

EUGENIO ISRAEL CHÁVEZ BARRETO

The Semiotic Theory of Luis Jorge Prieto





DISSERTATIONES SEMIOTICAE UNIVERSITATIS TARTUENSIS

42

**EUGENIO ISRAEL CHÁVEZ BARRETO**

The Semiotic Theory of Luis Jorge Prieto



UNIVERSITY OF TARTU

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Department of Semiotics, Institute of Philosophy and Semiotics, University of Tartu, Estonia

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Supervisor: Professor Kalevi Kull, PhD, University of Tartu, Estonia

Opponent: Associated Professor Emanuele Fadda, PhD, Calabria University, Italy

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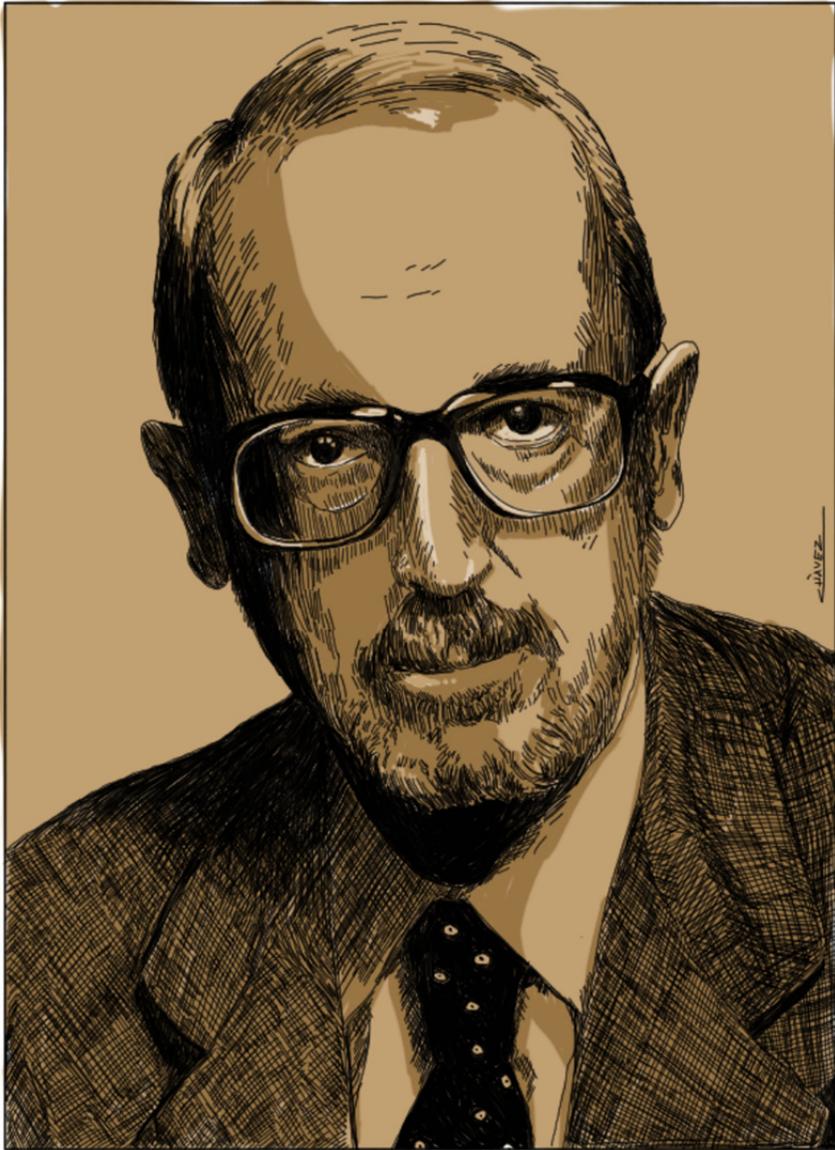
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Luis Jorge Prieto  
1926 - 1996



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	8
PUBLICATIONS INCLUDED IN THIS DISSERTATION .....	11
INTRODUCTION .....	12
1. AN OUTLINE OF THIS WORK .....	15
2. SUMMARY AND COMMENTARIES ON THE TEXTS INCLUDED IN THIS WORK .....	17
3. ON A NEW DEFINITION OF SEMIOTICS .....	23
3.1. Movement .....	23
3.2. Two types of arbitrariness .....	23
3.3. The mechanism of sign systems .....	24
3.4. Diachrony .....	27
3.5. The enchainment of sign systems .....	27
3.6. Conclusion and further developments .....	29
4. AS A SCHOLIUM: ON SOME METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	30
4.1. The chronological and the teleological approaches .....	30
4.2. The historical and theoretical contextualization .....	31
4.3. The methodology at work: a terminological clarification .....	34
4.4. The methodology as informing the works of this collection .....	39
5. NOTES ON THE INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY OF LUIS JORGE PRIETO .....	40
5.1. The early Córdoba years .....	41
5.2. A sojourn in Paris .....	46
5.3. The late Córdoba years .....	53
5.4. A long way from home: from Buenos Aires to Algiers to Paris .....	57
5.5. Imaginez cette chance pour Genève! .....	59
5.6. The last semiologist .....	70
REFERENCES .....	72
SUMMARY .....	76
SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN .....	79
APPENDIX. TRANSLATIONS .....	82
A Semiology: Problems and Routes .....	82
Pertinence and Ideology .....	93
PUBLICATIONS .....	111
CURRICULUM VITAE .....	231
ELULOOKIRJELDUS .....	233

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This dissertation was supposed to look slightly different than how it does. Initially, my aim was to write a monograph, but the time constraints did not allow me to complete all the work that was needed for that. Yet, this article collection as the final outcome of my PhD still reflects the work and theoretical reflection that took most of my time during the last four years. All this work, even though it is presented as mine, could not have been done in isolation, and it actually required the participation of many people.

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## PUBLICATIONS INCLUDED IN THIS DISSERTATION

### ON LUIS PRIETO'S SEMIOLOGY

- I. Chavez Barreto, Eugenio Israel 2021. A small note on phonology and semiotics, *à propos* the influence of Roman Jakobson in Luis Prieto's *Fonología del español moderno*. In: Sütiste, Elin; Gramigna, Remo; Griffin, Jonathan; Salupere, Silvi (eds.), *(Re)considering Roman Jakobson*. (Tartu Semiotics Library 23.) Tartu: University of Tartu Press, 95–108.
- II. Chávez Barreto, Eugenio Israel 2020. Abstraction, cognition and communication, on Luis J. Prieto as reader of Éric Buysens. *EPISTÉME* 23: 231–250.
- III. Chávez Barreto, Eugenio Israel 2022. Opposition, comparison and associativity: On Luis J. Prieto as a reader of the *Cours de linguistique générale*. *Sign Systems Studies* 50(1): 54–77

### ON LUIS PRIETO'S SEMIOTIC THEORY AND CONTEMPORARY SEMIOTICS

- IV. Chavez Barreto, E. Israel 2018. Ententionality and pertinence: framing end-directedness within two semiotic theories. *Biosemiotics* 11(1): 105–120.
- V. Chávez Barreto, E. Israel (unpublished). Prieto's theory of pertinence as a pathway from Hjelmslev's semiotic theory to Deacon's emergent dynamics.
- VI. Chávez Barreto, E. I. 2019. *Funktionskreis* and the stratificational model of semiotic structures: Jakob von Uexküll, Luis Prieto and Louis Hjelmslev. *Sign Systems Studies* 47(1/2): 69–87.

## INTRODUCTION

The present work is an investigation of the theory of signs formulated by Luis Jorge Prieto. There are three aims this work seeks to fulfill. First of all, it attempts to contribute to the dissemination of the theories advanced by Prieto. In this sense, an overview of Prieto's life and works based on archival sources of the universities of Córdoba, Buenos Aires and Geneva is given in the "Notes on the intellectual biography of Luis Jorge Prieto". Second, it presents an overview of three main tenets of Prieto's semiotic theory, namely the connection between material reality and phenomenal reality through cognition (especially in Chávez Barreto 2021, 2019 and 2018); the conception of semiotics as 'the study of the *raison d'être* of knowledge of material reality' (mostly in Chávez Barreto 2020, 2019); and the conception of semiotics as the study of all forms of arbitrariness and their consequences (Chávez Barreto 2022, and especially in the section "On a new definition of semiotics" of the present dissertation). Third, and finally, it is an attempt to show the relevance of Prieto's ideas for contemporary semiotics (especially Chávez Barreto 2019).

The value of our task resides in the fact that there has been little attention paid to the works of Prieto in contemporary semiotics. When his works were originally published, they did draw the attention of many prominent figures of semiotics. For instance, Umberto Eco mentions Prieto in his seminal work *A theory of Semiotics* and actively uses the typology of codes which Prieto proposed in his book *Messages et Signaux* (Eco 1976: 231–235); elsewhere (Eco 2007), he recognized the value of Prieto's theory of pertinence. Roland Barthes was certainly aware of the works by Prieto, and he included some of the articles written by the Argentinean semiotician in the bibliography appended to the volume of *Communications* where he presented his famous reversal of the Saussurean formula (Barthes *et al.* 1964: 143). Christian Metz published an article on the semiology of Prieto in *La linguistique* (Metz 1967) where he assesses Prieto's contribution to the linguistic problem of defining what a word is. Several articles in the *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* were also discussing some aspects of Prieto's theory. Most notably, the volume 30 of the *Cahiers*, includes a work by Dardel and Hilhorst (1976) in which they presented a detailed analysis of a Dutch booklet of train schedules and maps using Prieto's semiological theory as it was developed in Prieto (1964, 1966, 1968 and 1975). The volume also includes a discussion between Michel Burger and Prieto about the main ideas of *Pertinence et pratique* (Burger 1976, Prieto 1976). Three more volumes of the *Cahiers* contain several articles dedicated to the discussion of Prieto's ideas. These are, volume 45, from 1991, conceived as a sort of *fest-schrift* for Prieto; volume 50 from 1997, a posthumous homage to Prieto after he died; and volume 60 from 2007, which contains the presentations of a round table organized by the Italian Association of Semiotics on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of Prieto's passing. Volume 44, from 1996, contains an

important note written by Marie-Claude Capt-Artaud about the importance of Prieto's theory for the humanities at large.

Besides the *Cahiers*, the journal *Semiotica* also published an issue dedicated to Prieto the year after his demise. The issue was edited by Pierre Pellegrino, and it constitutes an excellent introduction to Prieto's thinking. Among the contributions, and to mention but a few, Krampen's article (1998) gives an overview of Prieto's theory in its totality; Simeonidu (1998) offers an excellent overview of Prieto's semantic theory; and J. C. Passeron (1998) presents a touching retelling of the conversations he had with Prieto and focuses on the "epistemological" aspects of Prieto's theory.

In linguistics, the book *La notion de situation en linguistique* by Claude Germain (1973) – with a prologue by Georges Mounin, one of Prieto's main interlocutors – develops a pragmatic oriented linguistic theory that draws inspiration from Prieto's theories (mostly Prieto 1964 and 1966). Herman Parret's remarkable book *Language and Discourse* also discusses thoroughly the main ideas of Prieto regarding semiology, linguistics and phonology. More on the semiotic side, the book *Semiotic Perspectives* by Sándor Hervey (2018) is also worth mentioning. Originally published in 1982, the book contains a full chapter dedicated to the theory of Prieto. The chapter mostly makes an exposition of the theory, depicting it as a theory of communication and of communicational acts. It is interesting to notice that Hervey was one of the main associates of J.W.F. Mulder, the main proponent of Axiomatic Functionalism, and a classmate of Prieto during the late fifties in Paris (see the Notes to the intellectual biography of Luis J. Prieto in this work).

In more recent years, the works of Emanuele Fadda stand out as one of the few to concentrate on the semiotic theory put forward by Prieto. Fadda has paid great attention to Prieto, starting with his doctoral dissertation *La semiotica una e bina, Problemi di filosofia del segno da Ch. S. Peirce a F. de Saussure e L.J. Prieto* (published as Fadda 2004). Besides this important work, Fadda has written on the relationships between Prieto's and Saussure's thought (Fadda 2002), on the relationships between Prieto and Hjelmslev (Fadda 2003), on Prieto's similarities with analytical philosophy (Fadda 2012), and on Prieto's notion of "practice" (Fadda 2007, 2010).

Also in Italy, Professor Paolo Fabbri contributed to bringing Prieto's semiotics to the foreground and paid special attention to Prieto's aesthetic theory (Fabbri and Perri 2005). As concerning other aspects of Prieto's theory, in 2018, Fabbri and Ugo Oliveri edited *L'atto di comunicazione*. In Belgium, Sémir Badir published an important article in which he critically approaches Prieto's theory of syntax (Badir 2001). In France, Francois Champion has applied Prieto's ideas to the pedagogy of language teaching (Champion 2003).

One cannot but immediately notice that most of the articles discussing Prieto's theory have appeared either in French or Italian, and only seldom in English. This is probably connected to the fact that Prieto's works have not been translated into English. The present work thus comes to fill a void in certain respects. First, because it discusses Prieto's works at length in English,

and second because it includes, in its appendix, the translations of two works by Prieto that have not appeared in English before.

If not only for the fact that our work attempts to bring an important semiotician into the English-speaking milieu of semiotics, the value of this dissertation consists also in how it shows in which respects Prieto's theory can be useful for contemporary semiotics. Accordingly, the next section will provide an outline of this work, and, after that, it will devote some lines to presenting our reading of Prieto's theory as a general semiotic theory.

# 1. AN OUTLINE OF THIS WORK

The main body of this work consists in a collection of articles and works written between 2018 and 2022. The common theme to all the texts included here is the semiotic theory of Luis Jorge Prieto. The work has been divided into six sections and an appendix. The first five sections correspond to the introductory part of the dissertation. The sixth section is comprised of five published articles and one unpublished manuscript. The appendix is constituted by translations into English of two of Prieto's articles, namely "Une sémiologie" (Prieto 1987) and "Pertinence et Ideologie" (Prieto 1975: 143–165). The translations include some notes about when and under which conditions the original texts were published. When it was necessary, we provide some explanatory notes to some of Prieto's ideas. These two texts included in the appendix were originally published in French, and subsequently translated into Spanish and Italian. The translations presented here are made on the basis of all the available versions.

The introductory remarks to the rest of the work are presented in sections two, three and four. Section two presents a summary of the texts included in this collection and some critical commentaries on them. The third section presents our own reading of Prieto's theory as a general semiotics beginning from a definition of semiotics as the study of all forms of arbitrariness and their consequences. The main aim of the section is to show that Prieto's theories bear heuristic capacities that are an asset for a contemporary general semiotic theory.

The fourth section presents a series of methodological considerations that were gathered from the process of writing the material included in this dissertation. Even though these methodological considerations are presented before the actual publications, they were developed during the process of writing. They are, properly speaking, theoretic-methodological remarks, at least to the extent that they constitute a sort of reflection upon the work that was carried out. As H. Meschonnic reminds us: "La *théorie* n'en est que l'accompagnement réflexif [de l'expérience]. Toutes deux, inachevables. L'expérience est première." ('Theory is but the reflexive accompaniment [of experience]. Both of them unfinished. Experience is first.' Meschonnic 1999: 9). Given that part of the articles included in this collection concern the history of semiotics, and the specific history of Luis Prieto's thought, the methodological considerations begin by discussing two approaches one can take towards the works of an author (a chronological and a teleological approach), and then it goes on to discuss how to contextualize the works of an author in relation to the moment in which they were written and to the moment in which they are being read or reinterpreted. This section concludes with a small case-example in which the methodological considerations are illustrated. The example deals with the problem of whether one should refer to Prieto's theory as a "semiotic" theory or as a "semiological" theory.

The fifth section presents some notes on Prieto's intellectual biography. The notes were compiled based on the archive materials we found in the universities of Córdoba and Buenos Aires, in Argentina. They comprise the academic

trajectory of Luis Prieto from roughly 1946 to 1996. Since they are ‘notes’, they are certainly not exhaustive, and because they were gathered from archive materials, some names that Prieto scholars might expect to find there are absent (e.g. Georges Mounin, Tullio de Mauro, Emilio Garroni, and other prominent Italian semioticians). Most of the information therein, especially regarding Prieto’s early years, has not been published before. Thus, these notes can certainly be considered a contribution into the history of semiotics and linguistics, and we can only hope they will be useful to other scholars in these fields.

As for the publications, they include five published papers, and one unpublished manuscript. The first three articles present Prieto’s theory following the methodological considerations found in the first part of this work. The other three articles try to bring Prieto’s theory into a dialogue with contemporary semiotics. The next section discusses the articles in detail.

## 2. SUMMARY AND COMMENTARIES ON THE TEXTS INCLUDED IN THIS WORK

The articles included in this work are distributed into two different sections, “Luis Prieto’s semiology”, dealing with Prieto’s theory proper, i.e. describing and explaining some of its main tenets, and “Luis Prieto’s semiotic theory and contemporary semiotics”, which tries to bring Prieto’s theory into a dialogue with contemporary semiotic research. It is worth noticing it that the order of the articles does not correspond to the order in which they were written, but they are arranged according to the methodological considerations that we present in the first section of the first part of this dissertation.

*“A small note on phonology and semiotics: à propos the influence of Roman Jakobson in Luis Prieto’s Fonología del Español Moderno”*

The section dealing with Prieto’s theory proper opens with an article (= Chávez Barreto 2021) written in the autumn of 2020 and published in 2021 as part of the book *Reconsidering Roman Jakobson*. It is placed as the first article because it deals with Prieto’s doctoral thesis and thus, pays special attention to the phonological theory he began developing in the early 1950’s. The article opens with a theoretical proposal that seeks to characterize phonology as a direct concern of semiotics. The main idea is that inasmuch as phonology deals with sounds-as-perceived, and thus with *classes of abstract objects*, and not with acoustic reality as such, phonology poses a problem that is fundamentally semiotic. This proposal heavily borrows from Prieto’s own ‘cognitive interpretation’ of phonological theory, and, implicitly, from Jakobson’s views on phonology as a concern matter of semiotics. Most of the proposal, however, is formulated in terms of John Deely’s distinction between *things* and *objects*. After framing phonology within semiotics, the article moves on to examine the main theoretical proposals found in Prieto’s first articles and the way these proposals were applied to the description of Spanish phonological system in Prieto’s doctoral thesis. The article concludes that the treatment of phonological systems by Prieto was always informed by semiological considerations, but, importantly, this results in the fact that semiotic principles are ruling phonological principles, and thus, Prieto’s theory is not a mere generalization of phonology, but an effort of conceiving phonology amidst the wider frame of semiotic processes.

*“Abstraction, cognition and communication: On Luis J. Prieto as reader of Eric Buyssens”*

The second article (= Chávez Barreto 2020) was written in the summer of 2020, in response to the kind invitation for publishing a paper on Prieto that Professor Kim Sung Do made to us after reading an article we prepared on Prieto’s reading of the *Course de Linguistique Générale*. One of the merits of this article on the relationship between Prieto and Buyssens, is that it presents, in a

preliminary form, the methodological considerations that we have included here in section four, and it is the only article that is explicitly following them (indeed, the two other articles dealing with Prieto's *semiology* are only following the methodological considerations implicitly). The situation under which this article was written (right in the middle of the first lockdown in Estonia due to the coronavirus pandemic) made the writing of it slightly rushed. This is noticeable in some errors in form (e.g. some words are misspelled, some sentences could have been erased to make the reading easier, etc.) and in some errors in content. The main error in the content of the article is, it seems to me, that we seem to suggest that classes, for Prieto, are defined intensionally. This is certainly wrong. Neither for Prieto, nor for set theory<sup>1</sup> – which is the main heuristic tool of Prieto – are classes defined intensionally. In fact, Prieto would often claim, albeit in his own parlance, that extension always precedes intension. Thus, if, for Prieto, a class is a set of objects such that they are equivalent to one another from a given point of view, this is not a consequence of the class being established intensionally, but the other way around: it is because the objects are equivalent from a given point of view, that the intension of a class can be further established. For instance, if in a given language there exists an alveolar voiced fricative phoneme, all its allophones are not equivalent because of the phoneme; instead, the phoneme can be posed because the sounds are recognized, by speakers, as being equivalent. The first part of the article, which mostly deals with what is there called an 'historical perspective' (pages 235–239) is however, very valuable, and it seems to me that represents a small contribution to the history of semiology and linguistics. In the measure that the article concentrates on the relations between Prieto and Buysens, it can be said to focus on the theoretical framework of Prieto's theory of communication. The proper topic of the article, however, is the way in which Prieto formalized some of the principles found in Buysens seminal work *Les langages et le discours*, and therefore the error we have just signaled becomes of capital importance.

*“Opposition, comparison, and associativity: on Luis J. Prieto as reader of the Cours de linguistique générale”*

The third, and last, article of this section (= Chávez Barreto 2022) was the first one to be written, and the last one to be published. It was written in the winter of 2019–2020 right after our research stay in Argentina, where we were working at the Prieto archives. It was written as a contribution to a special issue of *Sign Systems Studies* dedicated to the actuality of Saussure and edited by Professors Ekaterina Velmezova and Emanuele Fadda. The article follows, more or less, the structure of the previous article on Prieto and Buysens, but, very much like the article on Prieto and Jakobson, it approaches Prieto's theory from what I have termed a 'teleological approach', that is, an approach that

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<sup>1</sup> This article refers to set theory as 'class logic'. This was done because in French, Prieto would not speak of *théorie des ensembles*, but of *logique des classes*. Chávez Barreto 2022, uses 'logic of classes' instead.

seeks to explain the late concepts used in Prieto's theory by means of the early concepts, explicating thus the development of Prieto's ideas. The main axis of the article is constituted by an analysis of a series of courses Prieto dictated in Córdoba in the early fifties. The analysis is made on the basis of looking at how certain notions that Prieto took from Saussure and Martinet are put together both in the courses and in the articles Prieto published in the early fifties – and which are, to a large extent, tightly linked with the courses' contents. These notions are opposition, contrast, articulation, proportion, and arbitrariness. The article provides thorough definitions for each of these notions as linguistic notions, and then tries to show to what extent they reappear as semiotic notions in the theory that Prieto was developing in the late eighties.

We have left out of this collection two unpublished manuscripts. The first of them was written in the summer of 2019 and the second of them was written in the summer of 2021. The manuscript of 2019 is a thirty-page study on the notion of “sème” as treated by Buysens and Prieto. We did not include this manuscript in this collection because it was written prior to our work in the archives, and there we found additional information that should be added to the published version. The manuscript from 2021 is a twenty-page work on the relationship between Barthes and Prieto. The manuscript mostly concentrates on the dispute over the scope of semiology (a topic briefly dealt with in the methodological considerations included in the present work), but it almost does not deal with the many ideas Prieto took from Barthes, and this is the reason why it was not included, for we decided that a work on Prieto and Barthes should carefully approach the notion of “connotation” and its role in each of the author's theories. Some information about this topic is provided in section 5, “Notes on the intellectual biography of Luis Jorge Prieto”, included in the present work.

*“Ententionality and Pertinence: Framing end-directedness within two semiotic theories”*

The section trying to bring Prieto's theory into a dialogue with contemporary semiotics is composed by three articles. The first article (listed as IV= Chávez Barreto 2018), published in the spring of 2018, attempts to put together Deacon's theory of emergent dynamics with Prieto's notion of pertinence. An important point to be noticed is the way in which the article deals with the notion of ‘classification system’. Therein, a ‘classification system’ is defined as a ‘simple’ sign system which might not partake of symbolic forms of semiosis, but which is instead limited to iconic or indexical semiosis. As of today, we would instead hold that semiosis is able to include iconic, indexical, and symbolic relations irrespectively of the complexity of the sign system that is being used. Also, we would rather adhere to a more faithful reading of Prieto in which ‘classification systems’, as opposed to what is said in the article, are directed towards only one plane of a semiotic structure. That is to say; classification systems, are composed of one-faced entities. The pertinence principle constructing them does indeed link the two planes of a semiotic structure, but a

classification system, by its own, does not encompass two planes, only one (Prieto 1975: 97–98; 102–105). Even though the article tries to define ‘classification systems’ as different from “semiotic structures”, we still find sentences claiming that a semiotic structure is composed by classification systems. The hidden problem, it seems to us, is that this particular article was assuming, without really addressing it, that semiosis can be ‘compositionally’ accounted for. Thus, in the article, semiotic structures are ‘composed’ of classification systems in the sense that, for instance, my ability to draw is ‘composed’ by my ability to see (alongside with some motor and cognitive abilities), however, we would now maintain, closer to Prieto, that semiotic structures are ‘composed’ by classification systems in the sense that any sign system is composed by an expression plane, with its organization, and a content plane, with its organization. In this sense, Chávez Barreto 2019, presents a better reading, because it is closer to Prieto’s, of the notion of ‘classification system’.

*“Prieto’s theory of pertinence as a pathway from Hjelmslev’s semiotic theory to Deacon’s Emergent Dynamics”*

The second article (listed as V= Chávez Barreto unpublished) is an unpublished manuscript written on the basis of a presentation for the 2019 Gatherings in Biosemiotics. This manuscript was written under the firm belief that Prieto’s theory differs from Hjelmslev in that Prieto is mainly a substantialist. This interpretation of both Hjelmslev and Prieto can be at least contested. On the one hand, it is true that Prieto defined himself as a substantialist, and did so by explicitly opposing his position to the one he considered was held by Hjelmslev’s glossematics. On the other hand, it could be argued that Prieto’s interpretation of Hjelmslev is heavily influenced by André Martinet’s interpretation of the *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language* (Hjelmslev 1961[1943]). Arrivé and Alali (2001: 49) have shown that Hjelmslev saw Martinet’s review as misrepresenting some of the tenets the Danish linguist had posed in the book, and Hjelmslev himself wrote to Martinet that he never proposed to leave substance out of linguistic description, as the French linguist seemed to have implied. Prieto’s interpretation of Hjelmslev is very much in line with the interpretation put forward by Martinet, and our manuscript reflects this Martinetian view showing up in Prieto, and through him, in us. Hjelmslevians who are familiar with glossematics, and with the fact that Hjelmslev can be certainly interpreted as not being an anti-substantialist, will probably judge that the manuscript departs from a false problem, and that the argumentation there presented did not need to oppose Hjelmslev to Prieto. The merit of the article, however, is that it establishes a link between the model of a “cognitive act” that Prieto presented in *Pertinence et pratique* and some tenets of glossematics. At the same time, this linkage brings the Prieto-Hjelmslev hybrid into connection with Deacon’s emergent dynamics and, without saying a word about Uexküll, it already hints at some possible connections between Prieto’s model and Uexküll’s schema of the *funktionskreis*.

*“Funktionskreis and the stratificational model of semiotic structures: Jakob von Uexküll, Luis Prieto and Louis Hjelmslev”*

The third article (listed as VI= Chávez Barreto 2019) was written during the first semester of my doctoral studies and published in *Sign Systems Studies* 47(1/2). The article follows some of the tenets of the previous manuscript, namely, it insists on the semiotic realism of Prieto, and focuses on the fact that Prieto’s substantialist stance involves the presence, in substance, of material correlates of form. Additionally, the article touches upon the problematic of developing a semiotic theory of the subject (i.e. an ‘interpreter’ as one of the relata of a sign relation) and thus highlights the role of choice and teleology within meaning-making. In general terms, the main merit of the article is that it proposes a possible way to map some principles of glossematics and of Prieto’s theory onto Uexküll’s *Funktionskreis* model. It, however, focuses more on the difficulties that would have to be resolved, proposing various solutions to them, and not so much in presenting a finished model. Thus, the main conclusion of the article is that *Funktionskreis* can be viewed in two ways when observed from the point of view of Prieto and Hjelmslev’s theories. These two ways are (i) *Funktionskreis* can be reformulated in terms of connotative signs, (ii) *Funktionskreis* exhibits a double pertinence in the content plane. An interesting point to notice is that both ways include a reference to ‘connotation’, for indeed, (ii) supposes that the objects composing the content plane of *Funktionskreis* would be conceived *connotatively* that is two times, first in regard to the set of all possible actions that can be elicited by a given *Merkzeichen* and second, in regard to the type of objects elicited by the same *Merkzeichen*. The article, on page 84, presents this view in the opposite direction, i.e. as if, first, there was a classification of objects and then a classification of activities. It seems that this is a minor mistake; from the point of view of the finished analysis we can state that first there are objects and then there are activities, but from the point of view of accounting for what is really going on within semiosis, activities must come first and objects later, at least to the extent that, paraphrasing Prieto, ‘first we set the ends, then we find the means’. This remark is important, because it explains better which sense is to be ascribed to “connotation” and to “connotative classification system”.

It is worth noticing that these two last texts were written under the firm conviction that Prieto’s theory could contribute the most to contemporary semiotics, and to biosemiotics specifically, if one was to develop his theory of the subject beyond the confines of anthroposemiosis – since he explicitly stated that proper subjectivity, primarily defined as a capacity to make choices, was an exclusively human capacity (Prieto 1987). In the course of my studies, this conviction was abandoned, and it became clearer that a more efficient way to show the heuristic capacities of Prieto’s theory was, instead, to focus on the divide he proposed between nature and culture, reinterpreting it as a divide between what follows from physical causality and what does not follow from it. This entails that the focus is no longer put on the question of whether choice is a necessary element of semiosis, but rather on the assumption that all signs are

fundamentally arbitrary, i.e. signs, and their meanings, are not a consequence of what things are in themselves. The main outline of this position is given in the first section of Chávez Barreto 2021, even though there the explanation is mainly given in terms of phonological theory. A more detailed explanation concerning general semiotics will appear in Bennett, Chávez Barreto, Kull, Lacková, and Miyamoto (forthcoming). An alternative formulation can be found in the introductory section of Chávez Barreto 2022, as it touches upon the problem of relative and absolute arbitrariness. The next section is devoted to presenting, along general lines, our own reading of Prieto's theory as a general semiotic theory.

### 3. ON A NEW DEFINITION OF SEMIOTICS

To regard Prieto's theory as built around the analysis of arbitrariness allows us to present it, precisely, as a theory of the arbitrariness of signs, and to the extent that signs can be considered as *knowing* relations, as a theory about the arbitrariness of knowledge – which is very much in tune with Prieto's own views (e.g. Prieto 1987). We have not included any article regarding this formulation in this dissertation because the necessary research for it is not finished. Here is, however, a brief sketch of such position.

#### 3.1. Movement

The main idea articulating this formulation is that of movement. By 'movement', we mean a way of addressing, and of being addressed by, material reality, or by conditions that are external, in some respect, to the cognizing subject. Every sign system has at its core a 'foundational' movement, which consists in a moment of choosing. Our understanding of 'choice' follows Kalevi Kull's (2015, 2018) formulation of the term as 'incompatibility between two simultaneous options'. Choosing as a foundational movement is then equated with the Saussurean notion of 'absolute arbitrariness' because the concept of 'choice' entails two fundamental aspects: (i) choice inaugurates, and it is a part of, local history, and (ii) choice, being a movement, supposes that meaning is fundamentally plural. By 'history', and 'local history', I mean the consequences that follow from choice and which are not reducible to the materiality of the objects being related through *movement*. Meaning as being fundamentally plural relates to the non-reducibility (or non-identity, cf. Bennett 2021) of the object signified to its material correlates. The non-reducibility implies a continuous growth, or at least a continuous mutability of signs. A sign system is thus conceptualized as a continuous movement, and thus, as a continuous choosing.

#### 3.2. Two types of arbitrariness

Now, to the extent that arbitrariness lies at the core of all sign systems, the question of how can they be systematic at all immediately arises. In a Saussurean spirit, we claim that arbitrariness includes in it a mechanism for delimiting itself. Since previous choices constrain future choices, absolute arbitrariness gives rise to relative arbitrariness (see Chávez Barreto 2022, Prieto 1975). Relative arbitrariness is itself a movement too, but it is not as 'free' as the foundational movement in which absolute arbitrariness consists. The seeming lack of freedom in relative arbitrariness is solely due to the fact that absolute arbitrariness sets constraints for relative arbitrariness.

For instance, two elements, *a* and *b* of a sign system can be said to be absolutely arbitrary. However, an element such as *ab*, in which *a* and *b* function as

meaningful parts, is only relatively arbitrary. If there were to be an element *c* covering a portion of what is expressed, or ordered, by a given system, such ordered or expressed portion would only be so (i.e. it would only have a *value*) in relation to *a* and *b*, and to the extent that it is an actual element of the given sign system it could not exist without being related to *a* and *b*. This is also important for relative arbitrariness, for while *ab* could be meaningful, *ac* (or *ba*) could be meaningless. It is in this way that relative arbitrariness gives rise to systematicity: precisely by limiting arbitrariness (Prieto 1975: 34–36).

The question becomes that of how to differentiate between elements that are absolutely arbitrary and elements that are relatively arbitrary. The answer is to be found in two mechanisms: articulation and proportionality. The treatment we offer of these two notions is directly taken from Prieto (and they are fully explained in Chávez Barreto 2022).

### 3.3. The mechanism of sign systems<sup>2</sup>

Let us explain this by means of, first, a set of definitions, and second, a small argumentation where we will put our definitions together.

As we have said, by absolute arbitrariness we mean a foundational movement that connects two things that do not need to be connected solely by virtue of their material constitutions. Relative arbitrariness, follows from absolute arbitrariness, and adds an element of motivation to what was wholly arbitrary.<sup>3</sup> The relationship to which arbitrariness gives rise, in both of its senses, is that of *signification* (Prieto 1975: 106).

Pertinence is a relation of equivalence between elements of a sign system. A principle of pertinence (Prieto 1975, Chávez Barreto 2018) is necessary to establish any classification that can be *functional* for a sign system. A pertinence principle always relates two universes of discourse, or two planes, inasmuch as in order to establish equivalences between the elements of one plane, there needs to be a reference to something else that does not belong to the same plane. Thus, to establish an equivalence between two expressions, it is necessary for them to relate to the same content. The elements of a sign system that are related with reference to the pertinence principle governing that sign system are said to be organized in a *form*, that is, the *form* of a sign system. If the same elements are regarded not in their organization but in their independency from the sign system, as instances of the processes enabled by the sign system, or as prior to the organization the sign system makes of them, they can

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<sup>2</sup> The term ‘sign system’ is to be understood here as a ‘functioning’, in the sense a ‘langue’, in the Saussurean sense, can be considered as a ‘functioning’ according to Toutain (2014). It does not follow precisely the sense in which Tartu-Moscow School uses the term, nor is it a technical term in Prieto’s own writings (who will rather speak of “codes” or of “semiotic structures”).

<sup>3</sup> We thus subscribe the ordering index-icon-symbol of the Peircean triad, as presented by Beuchot (2014). An overview of the problem of ordering this triad is given by Kull (2019).

thus be referred to as *substance*. And thus, following Saussure, a sign system is a form, not a substance.

A sign is a bifacial entity composed of expression and content, which is established by either absolute or relative arbitrariness<sup>4</sup> following a pertinence principle. If a sign is absolutely arbitrary, then it can be referred to as a minimal sign (Prieto 1954: 141); if a sign is relatively arbitrary, then it is assumed to be composed by minimal signs (Prieto 1954: 138).

Contrary to signs, which are bifacial, a figure is a monofacial entity. A figure is, properly speaking, an abstract class of elements<sup>5</sup>. The relationship between figures, is not that of signification but one of *contrast* or *opposition*. If two figures can appear in the same context, *ceteris paribus*, and their respective appearances make a change of meaning, then they are *opposed* to each other. Two figures that are contiguous to each other are said to be in *contrast* (see Chávez Barreto 2022 and the sources therein referred to).

Articulation is the main mechanism through which arbitrariness is delimited. We recognize two articulations that can be exhibited by sign systems. Since the two articulations are independent from each other, and since they can be partially present in sign systems the latter, at least theoretically, can present either no articulation, or present only the first articulation, or only the second articulation, or present one of them partially, or present both of them in all their extent, or, finally, present both of them but either one of them partially (cf. Prieto 1966: 79, ff.). What follows applies to sign systems presenting at least one form of articulation<sup>6</sup>.

The first articulation of sign systems is the articulation of the sign. If a sign system is only able to deal with signs, then it is said to present the first articulation. The second articulation is that of figures. A sign system which can operate with figures contains monofacial entities. In principle, the main criteria for differentiating between a sign and a figure is (i) whether or not the element carries meaning, and (ii) the spatiotemporal constitution of the element itself (cf. Prieto 1975: 17). Regarding, (ii), the proposal is that the features defining a figure cannot be spatiotemporally separated, as e.g. the being voiced of [b] cannot be spatiotemporally separated from its occlusion. The features borne by a sign, which define it as a given sign, are, in principle, always separable from a spatio-temporal point of view, but this separability is not relevant for the sign

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<sup>4</sup> In principle, this notion can be compatible with the Peircean notion of sign if we take expression to be tantamount to *representamen*, content with (immediate) *object*, and the relationship of signification with *interpretant*.

<sup>5</sup> This is also true of signs. The difference between “figures” and “signs” is that the first are classes of objects pertaining to one universe of discourse (thus monofacial, or monoplanar) and signs are classes of objects pertaining to two different universes of discourse (thus bifacial). A detailed explanation of this is given in Prieto 1990, where he uses “concept” for the monofacial entities, and “class” for the bifacial ones.

<sup>6</sup> Sign systems with no articulation are composed by the absence or presence of just one sign (cf. Prieto 1966:157).

system, which conceives of it as a functional unit, e.g. a word that is composed by a root and a suffix.

Because a sign can have components, it is important to differentiate when a sign is composed by other signs and when a sign is constituted by figures. First of all, we assume that in analyzing a sign system, one can go from the unanalyzed whole to its components (Hjelmslev 1961). The components can be recognized through commutation; i.e., if for a given situation of semiosis, one element can be substituted by another, *ceteris paribus*, and this substitution entails a change in semiosis (e.g. an opposite response to what would have been expected if the substitution would not have been carried out), then the two elements can be said to *commute*. Based on all the elements that can be substituted without a commutation relation taking place, one can aim to establish the functional-semiotic content of the said class of elements. But notice that this process needs to begin in the formal correlates of the substantial features; i.e. commutation always entails a principle of pertinence that establishes a given *form*. Without postulating a principle of pertinence, no description can be made of a sign system<sup>7</sup>.

If the class of elements is recognized to be always a *sign*, i.e. it always involve an expression and a content, then the element can be regarded as an element of the first articulation. If the class of elements is recognized not as a union of expression and content, but merely as a distinctive, and monofacial, part of an expression or as a distinctive part of a content then it can be regarded as a figure<sup>8</sup>.

A hypothesis to be proven outside of sign systems used by humans is that they are indeed functioning on the basis of these mechanisms. If they are, and if it is then licit to speak about minimal signs for every sign system that is minimally articulated, then proportionality as a further mechanism can be established as a general trait of sign systems. Proportionality is a relationship between at least two pairs of signs such that a given relationship existing between the two members of the first pair recurs in the second pair. Thus, in our example of the previous section, if *ab* can be recognized as composed of *a* and *b* as different signs, then it would be necessary for *a* and *b* to appear in other combinations, such as, *ad*, or *eb*, and thus one could establish, for instance that *ab* is to *ad* as *eb* is to *ed*, and so on.

The mechanism of sign systems presented above is a theoretical proposal, and it should be tested against empirical work. It is, certainly, mostly built on the basis of linguistic models, but the proposal might be general enough as to be applied to the description of sign systems that are neither used, nor built, by humans. In order to strengthen this aspect of our proposal, let us go back for a moment to the foundational aspects.

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<sup>7</sup> See the treatment of the Batesonian notion of information in Hoffmeyer and Emmeche 1991.

<sup>8</sup> Thus, for instance, in a word such as the Spanish /pata/ ('paw'), the phoneme /p/ can be a figure according to our definition. It is distinctive, as it differentiates /pata/ from /bata/ ('robe'), and it is monofacial in that it does not have a content of its own.

### 3.4. Diachrony

We have said that sign systems can be conceptualized as a continuous movement and as a continuous choosing. In this sense, sign systems can be thought of as a series of choices. From this point of view, it would be tempting to think that absolute arbitrariness is present only in the first choice, yet, this is not very accurate. The series of choices in which a sign system consists in is not simply linear. In principle, all minimal signs are absolutely arbitrary, and as such, they all realize the foundational movement in which absolute arbitrariness consists. But to the extent that minimal signs are established by movements, and, in principle, any given sign system is ‘open’ to the world, at least in the sense that it orders a given world and allows action upon it, arbitrariness, both absolute and relative, necessarily supposes that sign systems are ever-changing structures, and thus they cannot be fully described if regarded from a static point of view. Furthermore, arbitrariness makes diachrony relevant, for arbitrariness, inasmuch as it involves a local history, directly addresses the question of how sign systems develop and change, and it thus answers that sign systems change because of the way they are organized. This interpretation of Prieto, and of other structural ideas, is fully compatible, it seems to me, with the notions of ‘scaffolding’ and of ‘teleodynamic organization’ proposed in biosemiotics (see Chávez Barreto 2018, 2019).

### 3.5. The enchainment of sign systems

The question of change, which is brought up by arbitrariness, brings about the obvious fact that sign systems do not exist in isolation from each other. Specially within the sphere of human culture, it often happens that a sign system might change to fit semiotic needs that involve other sign systems. For instance, language might change in order to codify and express semiotic phenomena that are relevant for other spheres of culture that might not be directly ruled by language (e.g. politics of identity, religion, science, etc.). This brings about the need of differentiate between sign systems when they are regarded from two different points of view: that of ordering perception, and that of enabling practices. This topic has been my main concern in the last year, and I have presented three papers dealing with this problem in the *XXI Gatherings in Biosemiotics*, the *XII Conference of the Nordic Association of Semiotic Studies*, and the congress *Juri Lotman’s Semiosphere*.

The core of the proposal is that it is useful to differentiate between these two ways of looking at sign systems because they make sign systems appear being differently constituted. When a sign system is regarded as ordering perception, it can be said to be a *modelling system*<sup>9</sup>, when it is regarded as enabling a

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<sup>9</sup> The term “modelling system” is taken from the works of the Tartu-Moscow School, but our usage includes Thomas A. Sebeok’s interpretation of the term, i.e. “modelling” as closer to “umwelt” (Sebeok and Danesi 2000).

practice, it can be said to be a *semic structure*<sup>10</sup>. Now, let us briefly go back to the notion of ‘movement’. We defined ‘movement’ as a way of addressing and being addressed. “*A way of addressing*” can be taken to mean “*a way of conceiving*”, at least inasmuch as in addressing, one necessarily has to take a point of view from which one addresses the addressee. To define movement as a way of *conceiving* is relevant for our proposal because we want to claim that modelling systems and semic structures are constituted by different movements, and thus they are linked to each other also by different modalities of movement. Accordingly, these movements consist in different ways of conceiving the semiotic entities that constitute the sign systems that are being linked.

The main object to which we have applied these principles is anthropo-semiosis, and specifically, to the role and place of language within culture. The main question guiding our inquiry is that of what is really expressed by language? Our answer, again, follows some tenets of Prieto’s theory. For Prieto, a language, i.e. a specific *langue*, is linked to a sign system that he calls “intercomprehension system” (Prieto 1975:52). An intercomprehension system is a system that furnishes language with content: anything that can be said in a *langue* is given to the *langue* as a form organized by the intercomprehension system. More specifically, the intercomprehension system is linked to a *langue* in such a way that the expression of the intercomprehension system becomes the content of the *langue*. This is made by virtue of a connotative movement which consists in the content plane of the *langue* being subjected to a double classification, first in regard to the intercomprehension system, then in regard to the specific *langue*. For Prieto, this movement is connotative because he focuses on expression. Inasmuch as language expresses a content, the content is submitted to a previous organization. One could ask whether the intercomprehension system is linked to another sign system via this connotative movement. The answer is yes. The enchainment of sign systems, according to Prieto, begins with a sign system in which the content is the subject itself (Prieto 1975). Inasmuch as this movement is directed towards expression, we consider it directed towards practices, and thus, we regard this movement as being constitutive of *semic structures*.

If we look at the enchainment of sign system in the opposite direction, i.e. not from language to subject, but from subject to language, the emphasis is put on content, and not in expression. The interplay of semiotic entities becomes thus not that of one being expressed by another, but that of one being codified by another. We call this movement a metalinguistic movement, and we assign this mechanism to modelling systems. The difference between these two movements is, then, that in the connotative movement expression turns into content, while in the metalinguistic movement, content turns into expression.

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<sup>10</sup> The term “semic structure” is taken from Buysens. We enlarge the meaning of it by referring not only to sign systems as enabling communication, but to sign systems as enabling any kind of practice. From this perspective, Prieto’s instrumental act, would then be regarded also as a “semic structure” (cf. Prieto 1975).

By means of this distinction, language can appear as embedded within the whole of sign systems that make up a culture. This embeddedness, accordingly, has two dimensions: on the one hand, language is given its content by other sign systems, because language is an expression, but on the other hand, language contributes to the form of the content it expresses, because language is a modelling system.

### **3.6. Conclusion and further developments**

The enchainment of sign systems can be a useful tool to explain other types of semiosis than anthroposemiosis, but we have only concerned ourselves with it, and specifically with language. The first part of our proposal, i.e. the mechanism of sign systems as rooted in articulation and proportionality, can be generalized to other forms of semiosis, it seems to us. The generalization achieved is mostly due to our focus on arbitrariness, and from this point of view, semiotics, as a discipline, can be defined as *the study of all forms of arbitrariness and its consequences*.

The future work will thus mainly consist in the analysis of sign systems via the principles we have posited in the previous pages. Since our main concern remains language, most of our research in the immediate future consists in concentrating on phonological systems as a semiotic fact. Our main interest is, precisely, the analysis of phonological systems by means of the distinction between modelling systems and semiotic structures, and from there, to the relationships between phonology and other linguistic levels. In parallel, we see a great deal of potential in analyzing language as a semiotic fact from the point of view of the enchainment of semiotic structures. It seems to us that only through such analysis will our proposal achieve proper validity and usefulness.

## 4. AS A SCHOLIUM: ON SOME METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### 4.1. The chronological and the teleological approaches

When trying to give an account of the whole constituting a given author's work, one is immediately faced with the problem of how to organize one's exposition. Indeed, the choice is between, at least, two options. The first option is to examine the manner in which concepts and ideas were developed through time, e.g., by going from the earlier texts of an author to his, or her, latter texts, and thus showing how a given idea came to be changed, and others remained the same throughout the author's life. This option offers, as a result, an assessment of the early texts at the light of the late texts, e.g. we can see how much an author moved away from the point where they started from, and we can give an account of the chronological evolution of their theory. Thus, this first option could be called a *chronological approach*. The second option is to look at the theory in a "backward" fashion. In this way of approaching the work of an author, one would instead look at the late works in the light of the early works, and instead of simply describing the development, one would aim to explain the reasons behind a particular development. By this approach, the result is an assessment of the late texts in the light of the early texts. This second option can thus be called a *teleological approach*<sup>11</sup>. Now, certainly, in practice, both approaches must be combined, and it is impossible, I would believe, to give a comprehensive and thorough account of a given author's work without shifting between one and the other.

The main aim of this work is to present Luis J. Prieto's semiotic theory and to make a commentary of it highlighting its heuristic and explanatory capacities for contemporary semiotic research. The articles included in the first part of this collection mostly follow a combination of both approaches, and this is also reflected in the way we have arranged them: the order of our exposition is mostly chronological, but its content follows a teleological approach. Let us comment on the methods employed when writing the articles.

Naturally, regardless of one's choosing a chronological or a teleological approach, it is also necessary to contextualize historically (i.e. to position within a given timeframe) and theoretically (i.e. to position within a given theoretical frame, in a very loose sense of the term "theoretical frame") the theory one is trying to present. In our specific case it happens, as it does with many other semioticians from the twentieth century, that Prieto's work is historically and

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<sup>11</sup> The term, and the conception of a 'teleological approach', is borrowed from the philosopher and anthropologist Tomás Pollán. He presented the idea of approaching an author's thought in a 'teleological way', in more or less the same sense that we use the term in this work, in a course about the philosophy of E. Cassirer that Professor Pollán dictated in 2014 at the Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas, in México. Since Professor Pollán is very reluctant to publish, there is no text to which we can refer the reader.

theoretically framed by two disciplines: linguistics, and specifically, by what would come to be known as structural linguistics, and by a specific way of conceiving semiotics, namely Saussure's *sémiologie*. This results, first and foremost, in the fact that an account of Prieto's theory must either "chronologically" begin with linguistics, or go back "teleologically" to it. But notice that the contextualization of Prieto's work in linguistics and semiotics responds to reasons that are both extrinsic and intrinsic to Prieto's theory. The influence of Saussure's *Cours* in the landscape of linguistics of the last century is an important factor to consider when giving an account of Prieto's works (and thus part of a dimension to be considered in the historical contextualization), but so is the interpretation made by Prieto of what he considered to be basic Saussurean principles (which bespeaks the need for considering this as part of a dimension in the theoretical contextualization).

## 4.2. The historical and theoretical contextualization

To give an account of Prieto's theory, then, requires a double contextualization: historical and theoretical. We insist that this is needed to understand Prieto's work and to assess its heuristic capacities for contemporary semiotics. The historical contextualization will impose limits on the way we approach Prieto's work<sup>12</sup>, and these limits, inasmuch as they are able to constrain the theoretical

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<sup>12</sup> Here is an example. Today, one could read a work like Prieto's *Messages et Signaux* as disregarding zoosemiotics. One could even accuse Prieto of anthropocentrism based on that work alone, if only for the fact that he does not consider animal communication. This reading could be valid, but once the work is historically contextualized in its own time, what can appear as lacking might be explained via such contextualization: in the 1960's, zoosemiotics was still struggling to be the established subfield of semiotics that it is today, and the general orientation of semiotics was still mainly that of developing a theory of anthroposemiosis. Yet, a look into Prieto's archives show that he was actively involved, at least as a thesis supervisor, in research about animal communication. The historical contextualization should also include the fact that *Messages et Signaux* was born out of a previous work, "La sémiologie", which Prieto began writing while in France, studying with A. Martinet. The fact that Prieto was studying with Martinet is relevant to understand Prieto's growing functionalist orientation (in the sense that Martinet can be called a "functionalist"). Now, certainly, this historical contextualization, considering its extrinsic and intrinsic dimensions, acts upon the theoretical contextualization. Namely, semiology as conceived by the functionalists was more preoccupied with finding the place of human language within the whole of communicational systems, and this could also include animal communication (see e.g. Buysens 1943:10): the semiological project as envisioned by Prieto consisted mostly in establishing a general typology of sign systems in order to uncover the specificities of human verbal language, but this was to be achieved only by putting human verbal language among all the other social institutions that can be used to communicate (and this would not necessarily rule out nonhuman sign systems). The aim of Prieto's semiology was not that of linguisticizing other sign systems, but rather to see human verbal language as belonging to a broader phenomenon, and via this, to find out what were the general principles shared by human verbal language and other sign systems. A combination of both contextualizations, would allow us to read Prieto's typology of signs presented in *Messages et Signaux*, as a

contextualization, will allow us to see which aspects of Prieto's theory are useful in contemporary semiotics and which aspects have to be modified if they are to be deemed useful for a contemporary general semiotics<sup>13</sup>.

The double contextualization of Prieto's theory results in this work being situated *in between*, that is *at-the-border-of*, two different fields. One part of this work could be seen as belonging to the history of semiotics and linguistics, but another part of it could be seen as a work on theoretical semiotics. Since the main object of this dissertation is Prieto's theory as such, we privilege the theoretical contextualization. Yet, the theoretical contextualization must, by necessity, be historical in a first moment, but it is important to bear in mind that it need not be exclusively bound to one historical context, at least to the extent that any given theory does not necessarily cease to be valid, or useful, simply because it is old, and to the extent that a theory can be reinterpreted in the light of theoretical frameworks that are not chronologically contemporaneous. In this sense, the theoretical contextualization "transcends", in some respects, the immediate historical context, at least when the theoretical contextualization relates the theory to a theoretical frame that is still deemed able to explain things that fall within the scope of a given discipline's object of study – and we will certainly regard Saussurean semiotics in this way. Thus, the transcendence of the historical contextualization is almost illusory: to show in which way Prieto's theory is relevant today supposes both a theoretical and yet another historical contextualization in relation to contemporary semiotics, thus, a contextualization in relation to the present state of semiotics, and not in relation to the moment in which Prieto was effectively working. Yet, if a theory that reached its definite state almost thirty years ago can be deemed useful today, i.e. able to explain things that fall within the scope of semiotics, in the light of all the progress this discipline has made in three decades, then it is easy to see that, actually, it is the theoretical contextualization that informs the historical contextualization<sup>14</sup>.

Naturally, both the theoretical and the historical contextualization must be delimited, and their delimitation might at times be reciprocal. Let us explain this. As we have said before, the impact of Saussure's *Cours* in the landscape of linguistics in the twentieth century is, without a doubt, a necessary factor to

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classification of different kinds of syntactic-semantic configurations of sign systems, and we could thus approach animal communication on such basis. This assessment is certainly yet another historical and theoretical contextualization, done this time not in relation to the time of *Messages et Signaux*'s, but to our own time.

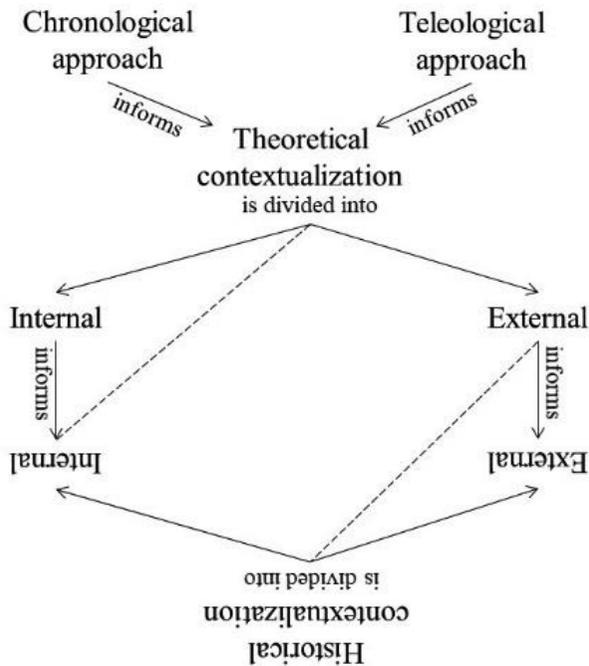
<sup>13</sup> By a "contemporary general semiotics" we mostly mean a comprehensive theory of signs that includes biosemiotics.

<sup>14</sup> This is true at least from the point of view of this work, which prioritizes the theoretical dimension. Were this work to be concerned solely with the history of semiotics, or with the history of ideas, probably the stress would have been put elsewhere. In any case, it is important to remember that these are but methodological distinctions: they are only done for the sake of enhancing our means of description. In reality, I would think, there is a constant tension between the historical and the theoretical, a tension that effectively tends to link them together to the extent of making them almost indiscernible from one another.

consider when giving an account of Prieto's theory, and thus it belongs to a dimension of the historical contextualization. The fact that Amado Alonso had arrived in Argentina and translated the *Cours*, thus introducing Saussure into the Spanish speaking linguistics *milieu* of the second half of the twentieth century, only indirectly belongs to the theoretical contextualization, and it belongs directly to the historical contextualization. The influence of Saussure in the Argentinean linguistics of the 1940's and 50's directly belongs to a dimension of the theoretical contextualization, at least inasmuch as Prieto considered himself a Saussurean. Now, the fact that Prieto had to leave Argentina in 1956 partly because of political reasons, and that he precisely went to Paris to study under Martinet, who had just returned from New York, is certainly part of the historical contextualization, but while Prieto's acquaintance with Martinet's works is directly a part of the theoretical contextualization, the reasons why he had to go to Paris are not directly a part of it. It seems thus that when delimiting each contextualization, we should take into account the fact that they have two dimensions. In the case of the historical contextualization, one of those dimensions is closer to the theoretical contextualization (the impact of Saussure's *Cours*, Martinet's functionalist interpretation of Saussure, etc.), and another is further from the theoretical contextualization (the political situation in Argentina, the fact that Martinet was back in France and no longer in New York, etc.). We will thus call them the internal and external dimensions of the historical contextualization.

Accordingly, the theoretical contextualization will be divided in the same way. The reception of Saussure's *Cours* in Paris, and the rise of a functionalist interpretation of the *Cours* that was already advanced by Buysens in 1943, are all facts belonging to the theoretical contextualization, but they are closer to the historical contextualization. The fact that during the period in which Prieto studied under Martinet we see a shift in his writings towards semiology, towards the use of the logic of classes as his main heuristic apparatus, and an explicit adhesion to functionalism are facts belonging to the theoretical contextualization which are further away from the properly historical contextualization and closer to the internal development of Prieto's own theoretical positions. Within the theoretical contextualization, the facts closer to the historical contextualization will be regarded as the external dimension of the theoretical contextualization. The facts that are further from the historical contextualization will belong to the internal dimension of the theoretical contextualization.

From what we have said, it follows that the internal dimension of the historical contextualization is overlapping to a large extent with the theoretical contextualization taken as a whole (that is, as including both of its dimensions), and, conversely, the external dimension of the theoretical contextualization overlaps to a large extent with the historical contextualization as a whole. These methodological considerations can be summarized by means of figure 1.



**Fig. 1.** A diagram of the methodological considerations of this study. The dotted lines indicate, respectively, the overlapping between the theoretical contextualization as a whole and the internal dimension of the historical contextualization, and the overlapping between the historical contextualization as a whole and the external dimension of the theoretical contextualization.

Let us bring an example where we can use the methodological considerations we have presented. This example will be the problem of whether this work should speak of Prieto’s theory as a “semiotic theory” or as a “semiological theory”. The choosing of this particular example is not gratuitous, for it seems to us that it touches upon all the problems arising from the multidimensionality of our object of study.

### 4.3. The methodology at work: a terminological clarification.

It would seem that when historically contextualizing Prieto’s work in relation to its immediate historical context, that is to say, the second half of the twentieth century, the label “semiology” becomes legitimized as the name of the discipline, for, after all, Prieto was mostly following the Saussurean framework, which projected the elaboration of a *sémiologie*. The problems might arise when the theory is approached from our own context, when the term “semiology” is mostly understood either as synonymous with “semiotics” (i.e. mostly as a

French variant of the name of the discipline), or as referring to a “part” of semiotics (mostly, a special theory within the whole of semiotics that is devoted to anthroposemiosis, cf. Deely 2009). When referring to Prieto’s theory today, should one speak of “semiotics” or of “semiology”?

Let us first look at the historical external dimension. The dispute over the name of the discipline was, in principle, settled in 1969 when the International Association for Semiotic Studies was established in Paris (Eco 1976: 30 n.1). The dispute goes back to the “double origin” of semiotics, at least when it comes to the turn of the twentieth century. In 1968, one year before the first meeting of the IASS, Eco (1968: 383–384) would write:

[...] *essiste una discussione sul nome della disciplina in discussione. Semiotica o semiologia? “Semiologia”, si afferma quando si tenga presente la definizione saussuriana; “semiotica”, si insiste, pensando alla lezione di Peirce e alla semiotica morrisiana.*

[...] there is a discussion about the name of the discipline in question. *Semiotics or semiology?* “Semiology”, is affirmed when the Saussurean definition is taken into account; “semiotic”, is stated, thinking in the lessons from Peirce and Morris’ semiotics<sup>15</sup>.

He then goes on to tell us that the fate of “semiology” was sealed after Barthes’ reversal of the Saussurean formula. Indeed, Eco explains that after the presentation Barthes made in 1964 to the 4<sup>th</sup> volume of *Communications*, whoever wishing to undertake the study of sign systems independently of the tools given by linguistics, should say “semiotics”. Yet, *La struttura assente*, which is the book from which Eco’s quote was taken, maintains the name “*semiologia*” for the discipline, and “*semiotiche*” for the sign systems insofar as the objects of study of “semiologia” – that is to say, mostly following the Hjelmslevian proposal as presented in the *Prolegomena to a theory of language*.

Barthes’ reversal of Saussure’s formula was indeed a decisive factor in the history of the discipline, to the extent that by the mid-sixties, the French milieu of semiology became divided between two main groups: those who sustained that semiology should study first and foremost those phenomena that were intentionally produced to serve as signs, and those who sustained that semiology should first and foremost study phenomena that could be interpreted as a sign, regardless of the intentions behind their production (Klinkenberg 1979). The first group was thus that of the supporters of a “semiology of communication”, and the second group argued in favor of a “semiology of signification”. Barthes was the main proponent of the “semiology of signification”. The “semiology of communication” was championed by names like Georges Mounin, Eric Buyssens and Luis Prieto himself<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> All the translations are by the author of this work, unless stated otherwise.

<sup>16</sup> It’s important to notice that ten years later, Eco (1976) proposed a distinction between communication and signification that seemingly runs parallel to the one mentioned here. In

The internal dimension of the historic contextualization acquires some importance now. Prieto arrived in Paris in 1956. It was only a year later that Barthes' *Mythologies* was published. Interestingly, Prieto went to Paris to study with Martinet, around more or less the same time that Martinet was directing Barthes' work for *Système de la Mode* (Arrivé 2000: 20). It was precisely through the involvement with Martinet that Prieto would come to write the article "La sémiologie", which was, as Barthes' *Système de la Mode*, published several years after it was finished (and coincidentally, around the same time as Barthes' text). The volume of *Communications* in which Barthes published his "Éléments de sémiologie" included a critical bibliography in which two of Prieto's works are listed. Both articles deal with the analysis of the content plane, and they are thus classifiable either within linguistics or within the wider frame of semiology of communication, but this certainly did not prevent Barthes to include them in his bibliography. Apparently, however, no further references are made to Prieto on the side of Barthes. When it comes to how Prieto approached Barthes, first of all, it should be noticed that in 1965 Prieto was conducting a seminar, in Córdoba, about "the semiology of Roland Barthes"; secondly, it should be noticed that references to Barthes are present in several of Prieto's texts; and thirdly, that it was through the critique and analysis of certain notions proposed by Barthes that Prieto made important developments in his own theory as well as remarkable contributions to semiotics (see the "Notes on the intellectual biography of Luis Jorge Prieto" included in this work).

It is plain to see that when going through the internal dimension of the historical contextualization, one begins to come closer to the theoretical contextualization. According to our methodological considerations, the external dimension of the theoretical contextualization is very much overlapping with the historical contextualization, for to this dimension belong all the facts that we have mentioned: Barthes' publications in the fifties, and the role played by Martinet are facts of importance to this dimension, but they are to be fully included in the historical contextualization. Perhaps, an important fact that is relevant to add to

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Eco's view, the distinction is not to be made in terms of the intention of communication, but rather on the basis of a theory of codes (signification) and a theory of sign production (communication); the theory of codes is to study the sign function in itself, whereas the theory of sign production would study the relationships between signs and context, receiver, etc. The two semiologies that were competing in the French-milieu operated with the key distinction between 'indices' and 'signals', where the former encompassed either unintentional manifestations (as when someone is shaking regardless of their intention to let someone know they are cold) or objects that are not, in principle, produced with an intention to communicate (e.g. clothing and fashion), and the latter encompassed only objects that are explicitly produced with such an intention (e.g. road signalization, the numeration of hotel rooms, the numeration of bus routes, maps, etc.). Eco's distinction could be seen as referring to the same, if the notion of sign function is understood in a broad enough way as to include 'indices', or if the notion of signal is understood as necessarily entailing its conditions of production. A proper assessment of this problem is beyond the scope of our dissertation, but the fact that Eco draws a distinction within then discipline based on these two notions was important enough to be mentioned in this footnote. We thank Tyler Bennett to have pointed this out to us.

the external dimension of the theoretical contextualization is that the “semiology of communication” was also referred to as a “functional semiology” (e.g. in Klinkenberg 1979). This seems important to us at least inasmuch as Martinet’s interpretation of Saussure can be labelled as “functionalist” – which relates him to some points of view of Prague functionalists, whom Prieto directly cites as one of his main theoretical frameworks –, and because Prieto, alongside with Buysens, did explicitly approach *sémiologie* from a functionalist point of view (Prieto 1964, Buysens 1943: 35).

The internal dimension of the theoretical contextualization allows us to see better in which sense this is important. In order to do this, it is important to notice that, from the mid-fifties to the mid-sixties, Prieto was chiefly concerned with the elaboration of a *sémiologie* upon a functional framework, and that one of the main notions cementing this project was that of “semic act”, a notion, incidentally, taken from Buysens (1943). The notions of “seme” and of “semic act” were posed by Buysens and adopted by Prieto to better distinguish between mere manifestations of conscious states and intentional manifestations of them (see footnote six in the previous page); a “seme” is to be understood as an abstract category to which the manifold of particular states of consciousness and utterances are linked, the “semic act” is an actual realization of a given “seme”, thus the “seme” is the set of all the functional traits that allow communication to happen (Buysens 1943: 35)<sup>17</sup>. Already when “La Sémiologie” was published, in 1968, Prieto pointed to the fact that semiology was divided between the position of Buysens, which circumscribed the object of semiology to the “seme” as a functional entity, and the position of Barthes, which extended semiology beyond “semes”. In the coming years, however, Prieto would begin to be more explicitly concerned with semiology of signification, and at least during the seventies, his work became more and more directed towards it (see the “Notes on the intellectual biography of Luis Jorge Prieto”). The relevance of this is that it allows us to see how *sémiologie* was conceived by Prieto as within his theories. Let us now look at the question of the name of the discipline.

When examining Prieto’s own works, we encounter that the name of the discipline mostly changes depending upon the language in which Prieto was writing. Thus, it seems that, in French, the discipline was always called *sémiologie* for Prieto (in distinction with, for instance Greimas, who would nevertheless speak of *sémiotique*), and he would continue referring to his theory, even in the eighties, when the Peircean influence was stronger in the field, as ‘*une sémiologie*’ (Prieto 1987). However, in Spanish, both in the translations of his books and in interviews published in Latin American journals or newspapers, he would speak both of “semiótica” or “semiología” interchangeably<sup>18</sup>. The

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<sup>17</sup> The term “seme” has been differently used in linguistics and semiotics. See Schogt (2010) for a thorough explanation of these different uses.

<sup>18</sup> In the interview conducted by J. E. Finol (Finol 1976), “semiótica” is the term used throughout the interview, except for its closing lines where Prieto says: “Yo no me siento encerrado en ningún dominio del conocimiento en particular. Por eso me fastidia cuando me siento catalogar como “semiólogo lingüista o lingüista semiólogo”, o cosas por el estilo.

situation is somewhat similar in Italian. The *Saggi di semiotica* are written in Italian, but the translation into this language of *Messages et Signaux* bears the title *Lineamenti di semiologia, Messaggi e segnali*. This terminological shift might have had to do with editorial decisions, rather than with Prieto's, considering that the first volume of the *Saggi* includes the paper "Una semiologia: problemi e risultati". In German, however, the name seems to be "Semiologie" (Prieto 1979a). The three entries that Prieto wrote, in English, for Sebeok's *Encyclopedic Dictionary*, bear the term "semiotics". It would thus seem that from the point of view of the internal dimension, the name of the discipline was not a matter of debate for Prieto. The important aspect, rather, was the way in which the discipline was conceived in purely theoretical terms. The only remark in which Prieto indirectly addresses the question of the name of the discipline is to be found in *Pertinence et pratique* (Prieto 1975: 106, fn.24), where he wrote:

*Nous employons l'adjectif "sémiologique" pour designer ce qui relève de la sémiologie, et "sémiotique" pour designer ce qui relève de l'objet de la sémiologie: la sémiologie, peut-on dire, est l'étude du sémiotique.*

We use the adjective "semiological" for designating that which participates of semiology, and "semiotic" to designate what participates of the object of semiology: semiology, one could say, is the study of the semiotic.

It would thus seem that the historical and theoretical contextualization of Prieto's work in relation to his own context makes it valid to refer to his theory as "semiology". And it can be argued, to the extent that Prieto would often refer to his own work as "semiological", that one should use "semiology" when referring to his theory as embedded in its own context. The question remains of whether it is valid to refer to Prieto's theory as a "semiology" when referring to it from a historical and theoretical contextualization that sets it in relation to our contemporary context.

Before going into this question, let us notice that all we have said up to here was mainly informed by a chronological approach. The previous paragraphs were mainly offering a description of facts, but no proper explanation was given. The contextualization of Prieto's works in relation to our own context, i.e. contemporary semiotics, must however be teleological by necessity. It must be so, because this contextualization does not aim to simply describe Prieto's theory, but to show the relevance of it for present-day semiotics.

Thus, when it comes to contemporary semiotics, it is normally accepted that, outside French-speaking semiotics, the name of the discipline is "semiotics". The fact of having several designations available can be used, for better or worse, to highlight some aspects particular to given theoretical approaches. Thus, for instance, John Deely would often write that 'semiology' is but a part of 'semiotics', inasmuch as 'semiotics' has a wider scope than only 'conven-

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¿Qué sentido tiene encasillar así a la gente?." (Finol 1976:47). Other interviews in Spanish use the term "semiología" (e.g. Prieto 1979c).

tional man-made signs' (Deely 2009). Deely's opinion can be justifiably applied to some definitions of semiology, but certainly not to all the theories that could be labeled as 'semiology'. Moreover, Deely's position supposes that a semiological approach cannot lend itself to the study of sign systems and sign processes beyond anthroposemiosis, which is not necessarily true. The article "*Funktionskreis* and the stratificational model of semiotic structures" included in this collection begins to take some steps precisely in that direction (which is supposedly precluded by semiology in Deely's eyes).

To approach Prieto's theory from contemporary semiotics would, then, involve the reevaluation of its main tenets in the light of contemporary advances in the discipline, and to change and develop the theory in the ways that are considered necessary. As such, for instance, the semiology of communication proposed by Prieto could be modified in order to be used in non-human sign systems. It makes no sense to disregard Prieto's theory for its being a 'structural' theory without really trying to use it as a means of description, at least to the extent that structural theories are still used in linguistics with descriptive purposes.

When referring to Prieto's theory from the present-day semiotics, the two possible designations would rather function like connotators: "semiology" would immediately bring to mind the specific context, both historical and theoretical, in which the theory was proposed, and "semiotics" would instead bring to mind the homogeneity of the field, i.e. the fact that Prieto's theory is a theory about sign systems and sign processes. Inasmuch as one of the central aims of this dissertation is to show the heuristic potency and the validity of Prieto's theory for the present state of our disciplines, we have chosen to name this dissertation "The semiotic theory of Luis J. Prieto".

#### **4.4. The methodology as informing the works of this collection**

The second part of this dissertation includes the published articles and one manuscript constituting the proper body of this work. The first section of this second part, composed by the works that give an overview of Prieto's theory, is more noticeably informed by the methodological considerations we have presented. The second section, which is concerned with showing the actuality of Prieto's theory, is not directly informed by these considerations, but the works included therein certainly show the necessity of contextualizing Prieto's theory both historically and theoretically in relation to the moment in which they are being used. The work in this regard, however, is far from being finished, and we expect to continue with the efforts necessary to show to which extent the careful analysis of Saussurean inspired *semiotics* can constitute an asset for the contemporary theory of signs.

## 5. NOTES ON THE INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY OF LUIS JORGE PRIETO

*“If wandering is the liberation from every given point in space, and thus the conceptional opposite to fixation at such a point, the sociological form of the “stranger” presents the unity, as it were, of these two characteristics. This phenomenon too, however, reveals that spatial relations are only the condition, on the one hand, and the symbol, on the other, of human relations.”*

G. Simmel, *The Stranger*

In September 2019, the 14th World Congress of Semiotics took place in Buenos Aires, Argentina. It was there where I had the opportunity to meet Pierre Pellegrino<sup>19</sup>, a close friend and colleague of Luis Jorge Prieto. I had gotten in touch with Professor Pellegrino a few months before the Congress, and by the time we met personally he already knew I was preparing a dissertation on Prieto’s theories. On the first days of the Congress, we went to “El Chiquilín”, a very nice restaurant in downtown Buenos Aires, located just a few steps away from the congress venue. There, we had lunch, coffee, and talked about the works and the life of Prieto. Pellegrino told me that he had decided to come to Buenos Aires mostly to pay homage to his dear friend: “Luis”, he said, “was always longing for Buenos Aires, the city where he was born. He used to say: “Pierre, in Buenos Aires there are tall buildings and big avenues, and at the end of them: ¡La Pampa!””. He and Prieto met for the first time in 1971 via Martin Krampen, for whom Pellegrino was an assistant at the time. During those years, Prieto was developing the main proposal of his book *Pertinence et pratique*, undoubtedly one of his major works concerning general semiotics. He had already been away from Argentina for more or less five years, and some more years would pass before he could freely visit his home country again.

When Prieto died, in 1996, two major journals in linguistics and semiotics edited issues paying tribute to his memory. One of those journals was *Semiotica* (the other was the *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure*), and it was precisely Pellegrino who, by suggestion of Sebeok (Pellegrino 1998), edited the issue. Among the contributors to the *Semiotica* number, there was the geographer Antoine Bailly, who presented a text that was “the result of past discussions with Luis Prieto” (Bailly 1998:291). In his article, Bailly reminds us that Prieto was a “marginal man”, a “stranger”, in the sense of Robert Park and George Simmel respectively; in other words, he was a “citizen of the world”. But it is important to notice, as Bailly rightly insists upon, that the marginality of Prieto

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<sup>19</sup> Sadly, Pellegrino passed away in March of 2022. I would like to express here my most sincere gratitude to him, as he helped me a lot through some online and in-person conversations about Prieto and the semiotics of space in general.

was derived both from his condition of being an immigrant in Geneva, and from his groundbreaking and often pioneering work in linguistics and semiotics. Yet, as Bailly also claims, it was this very marginality that, at the same time, allowed Prieto to be at the center of the world of semiotics.

I believe that Prieto's condition of "being a *stranger*" is a fundamental factor to take into account when talking about his life and the development of his thought. It has been claimed by others, usually the people who met him personally (e.g. Redard 1991), that the circumstances under which he developed his theory were most of the times difficult to bear. Prieto left his home country for the first time due to political reasons in 1956, when he was thirty years old, and although he was able to go back four years later, in 1960, and spend six years there, which were extremely productive from an academic and intellectual point of view. In 1966 he lost his job, again for political reasons, and he was practically forced to leave Argentina once more. He therefore relocated to Algeria, then to Paris, and finally to Geneva in 1969. It was only after the so-called *Process of National Reorganization* ended in Argentina with the 1983 democratic election of Raúl Alfonsín, that Prieto was able to freely visit his home country again. Before the 80's Prieto had only a brief chance to go back to Argentina when Perón returned to power in 1973, but the right-wing Peronist forces prevented him to settle there again (cf. Redard 1991, Martinet 1990: 91). Throughout his life, Prieto was a self-declared Marxist and communist very active in the left wing political spectrum through publications, usually in Gramscian and Marxist inspired newspapers.

## 5.1. The early Córdoba years

The marginality of Prieto is not reduced to his exile and his political struggles. His university years were also marked by this condition of being-on-the-edge. In 1947 he enrolled to the National Córdoba University in a recently created program in humanities that included philology and linguistics as a field of specialization<sup>20</sup>. During the 40's structural linguistics was an emerging field in Argentina, mainly nurtured by the work and presence of the Spanish linguist and philologist Amado Alonso, at the Buenos Aires' Institute of Philology. Alonso was instrumental in the development of Argentinean linguistics (cf. Barrenechea 1996, Giammateo 2007): it was precisely he who in 1945 translated into Spanish, for the first time, Saussure's *Cours de Linguistique Générale*<sup>21</sup>. Ana María Barrenechea (a student of Alonso, colleague of Prieto,

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Vallejos 2015, the program consisted of a B.A. and a PhD, the difference between them was that the PhD required a thesis for graduating.

<sup>21</sup> A. Alonso's translation is not the only translation into Spanish of Saussure's book that has been published, even though it is the more famous. J. Polo (1992) reports that Dámaso Alonso translated some parts of the book during the thirties but, apparently, they have never been published. Prieto first read Saussure through Alonso's translation, but very early on he became familiarized with the original French version. The other Spanish translation of the

and another main figure of Argentinean linguistics) writes that during Alonso's period as head of the Institute of Philology "we knew the works of the Russian formalists who had immigrated to Prague and began to build the *avant-garde* of synchronic and diachronic linguistic structuralism (Trubetzkoy and Jakobson), along with the Czech Mukarovsky". Incidentally, she also says that while Alonso was working on the translation of the *Cours* he "assigned to Benvenuto Terracini the *Phonology* of Trubetzkoy, which remained without realization back then"<sup>22</sup> (Barrenechea 1996: 99).

In any case, the linguistic scene in Córdoba was not as vibrant as the one in Buenos Aires. Prieto, of course, was well aware of Alonso's work, as he first knew Saussure in Spanish, and he eventually came to establish close ties with Alonso's students. At the end of the forties and beginning of the fifties however, Prieto was something of an outsider in Córdoba. Redard (1991) tells us that during his early years, Prieto was largely autodidactic, mainly following a path of his own, although he was extremely active in the university life, for he was an assistant for the courses of Latin and Greek, and for the lectures on romance and classical linguistics – as for the linguistic courses Prieto taught during these years, see Chávez Barreto 2022. Yet, it seems that one of the greatest testimonies of his marginality during these years is to be found in his doctoral thesis, which was completed and presented for defense in 1953, but due in part to the problems it posed for the faculty to evaluate it, was only approved two years later, causing Prieto to receive his diploma in 1955.

The article "A small note on phonology and semiotics, *à propos* the influence of Roman Jakobson in Luis Prieto's *Fonología del Español Moderno*" (= Chávez Barreto 2021) provides a detailed explanation of the theoretical implications of Prieto's doctoral thesis. For now, let us concentrate on the way the thesis was received by the professors at Córdoba. First of all, it is important to mention that Prieto's thesis was a work on phonology. It was titled *Fonología*

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*Course* was made by Mauro Armiño and published in 1980 by Akal, an editorial house from Madrid.

<sup>22</sup> It is not clear if Barrenechea means that Alonso asked Terracini to translate the *Grundzüge* into Spanish, which would seem odd given that he was Italian, or to translate it into Italian. An article by Lore Terracini, Benvenuto's niece, includes reference to a series of letters from Alonso to Terracini in which he asks Terracini to review Trubetzkoy's book (L. Terracini 1996:51). Actually, the first translation into Spanish of Trubetzkoy's *Grundzüge* was made by Delia García Giordano and Prieto himself, but it appeared only in 1973, although the work for it had been made by Prieto already in the 60's (as can be seen in the research reports from Prieto found in Córdoba, see below). In 2019 a new translation into Spanish appeared in Mexico, made by Esther Herrera Zendejas and Michael Herbert Knapp and published by El Colegio de México. The main advantages of Herrera and Knapp's translation over Giordano and Prieto's are mainly that Herrera and Knapp included the notes by Jakobson, the appendixes on linguistic geography, and that it is a critical edition. We haven't been able to compare the two Spanish editions, but there is a very detailed review of the new edition written by Etna T. Pascacio Montijo (Pascacio Montijo 2020) and published in *Cuadernos de Lingüística de El Colegio de México*, and the review includes a small overview of Trubetzkoy's reception in Mexico.

*del Español Moderno* ('Phonology of Modern Spanish'). This alone posed some problems for the faculty (cf. Vallejos 2015, Redard 1991), and caused one member of the evaluation committee, Professor Florencio Chávez, to resign, as he was not able to deal "with such a highly specialized work". In order to fill Chávez' place, Fritz Krüger, a German linguist who had arrived to Argentina from Hamburg in 1949, was invited as the new member of the committee<sup>23</sup>. At the end, the reviewers of Prieto's thesis were Krüger and the professors Próspero Grasso, Clementino Sanz, Antonio Catinelli and Magdalena Linero – although on the day of the exam, December 30<sup>th</sup> 1955, the tribunal was only composed by Grasso, Catinelli and Linero.

The thesis was evaluated according to five criteria: (1) framing of the topic within the study plan, (2) mastery of the topic, (3) technical-philosophic

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<sup>23</sup> The rapport between Prieto and Krüger was actually established well before 1953. In 1951, Prieto went to Mendoza to study with Krüger at the Universidad Nacional de Cuyo. There, Prieto made two translations, from German into Spanish of two works, even though only one was published. The published paper was "Las investigaciones sobre fonética en la Alemania actual", by Otto von Essen, published in the *Anales del Instituto de Lingüística*. The unpublished work was presumably a book by Max L. Wagner titled *Contribuciones al estudio de los sufijos ibero-romances*. However, we were unable to find the book as such in Wagner's bibliography. We could only find a series of articles published by him on the topic of ibero-romance suffixes, and it was probably these works that Prieto translated (although in a CV from 1954 Prieto says that the work is more than one hundred pages long). As for Krüger, he arrived to Argentina in 1948, after the war. In Germany, Krüger was one of the main representatives of the Hamburg School, which closely followed Schuchardt's *Wörter und Sachen* approach. Krüger was a well-known Romanist who specialized in the dialects of the Iberian Peninsula. A book published by him in 1960, on a linguistic construction specific to Argentinean Spanish, contains an acknowledgement to Prieto, where he is referred to as "a young Romanist from Córdoba" (I thank Sol Pérez Coti from the Buenos Aires' Intitute of Linguistics for indicating this fact). The influence Krüger might have had on Prieto is to some extent a matter of speculation. The relationship between them certainly could be another source for Prieto's exposure to the German theories of language of the late XIX century and the early XX century. This is interesting, indeed, given the conflict between Schuchardt's approach and the Neogrammarians, and given the fact that one of the courses taught by Prieto in the early 50's contained an overview and critique to the Neogrammarians' laws of phonetic change and analogy; however, it is likely that this critique was rather made on the basis of Trubetzkoy's and Martinet's functionalism. In any case, the bibliography of that course shows Prieto's familiarity with German linguists, as the bibliography includes works by W. von Wartburg (who was actually a Romanist and colleague of Krüger), and Hermann Paul (for a detailed exposition of these courses' content see Chávez Barreto 2022). Prieto, of course, might have known about these books for other reasons, and not necessarily because Krüger introduced him to them. A possible source of information regarding the influence Krüger might have had on Prieto's thought is a footnote on p. 160 of *Pertinence et Pratique*. In that footnote Prieto speaks of a "well known Romanist" who told him in 1952 that it was superfluous to write an article that would demonstrate that in Spanish there are five vowels. Prieto does not reveal the name of the Romanist, and it is only by a conjecture that we could attribute Krüger's identity to him. If that were the case, and it could very well be the case given Krüger's evaluation of Prieto's doctoral thesis, the influence of Krüger in Prieto was simply that of pushing the Argentinean closer to phonology and farther from the inclinations of the German professor.

language, (4) rigorous scientific methodology and (5) contributions to the discipline and to culture in general. Grasso and Sanz (their evaluation was written on October 30<sup>th</sup> 1953) graded Prieto in their review with the highest mark (10 points) in every criterion except (3) and (5); these two criteria were graded with 9 points each. Regarding (3), they wrote: “Le aconsejamos también que piense en castellano. Tal vez por la índole de la bibliografía manejada, se le han deslizado aquí y allá algunos galicismos” (‘we advice [the student] to think in Spanish. Perhaps due to the nature of the bibliography dealt with, some Gallicisms have slipped into the text here and there’). As to (5), the reviewers wrote

*[...]la tesis [...] aunque no ofrece soluciones originales, tiene sin embargo el mérito de aplicar las teorías del Círculo de Praga al hecho lingüístico concreto del español actual. Viene, si no a llenar un vacío en la literatura fonológica española, a aumentar con un aporte valioso la no muy nutrida bibliografía sobre el tema.*

[...] the thesis [...] even though it does not offer original solutions has, nevertheless, the merit of applying the theories of the Prague Circle to the concrete linguistic fact of modern Spanish. It comes, if not to fill a void in the phonological Spanish literature, to increase with a valuable contribution the scarce bibliography on the subject.

And later on,

*[...] precisamente por ser trabajo de especialización, queremos advertir al joven Licenciado que corre el riesgo de convertir en ciencia a se e independiente lo que en rigor es parte de un todo científico. Por eso le sugerimos que no aparte su vista de la multitud de problemas, ya genéticos, ya teleológicos, que todo lenguaje entraña. De otro modo, caerá irremediabilmente en los bizantinismos de escuela y exageraciones partidistas en que han incurrido algunos lingüistas de nuestro tiempo.*

[...] precisely for being a specialized work, we wish to warn the young B.A. that he runs the risk of turning into an *a se* and independent science what is, in fact, part of a scientific whole. That is why we suggest to him not to lose sight of the multitude of problems, genetic or teleological, entailed by every language. Otherwise, he will irremediably fall in the byzantine discussions of schools and factional exaggerations in which some linguists of our time have fallen.”.

Krüger (his review is dated December 22<sup>nd</sup> 1954), graded (5) with five points, and wrote

*Es de lamentar que la calificación del inc. 5 [...] no pueda ser mayor por la restricción del tema y el carácter mismo de la Fonología. Las condiciones excepcionales de filólogo que posee el Sr. Prieto y la seriedad ejemplar con la*

*que trabaja, le hubiesen permitido resultados ampliamente satisfactorios en otro terreno distinto del tema encarado.” It is interesting to notice the remark that Prieto’s thesis, according to Krüger, could have been better if it were not for “the very nature of phonology.*

It is a shame that the grade [of (5)] cannot be higher because of the narrowness of the topic and the very nature of phonology. The exceptional conditions of philology possessed by Mr. Prieto and the seriousness with which he works would have allowed him to obtain very satisfying results in a different field than the chosen one<sup>24</sup>.

Catinelli in his review (written October 16<sup>th</sup> 1955) graded (5) with seven points, and shared Krüger’s opinion: “La índole del tema elegido no ha permitido [...] alcanzar los resultados originales a que por sus condiciones de investigador y estudioso hubiese podido llegar en otros aspectos del lenguaje.” (‘the nature of the chosen topic has not allowed B.A. Luis Jorge Prieto to reach the original results to which, because of his conditions as a researcher [...] he could have arrived in other aspects of language.’). Linero (her review is dated December 13<sup>th</sup> 1955), on the other hand, graded all the criteria with ten points and made no further critical comments.

The “narrowness” of the results delivered by Prieto’s thesis is at least contestable. Among the main bibliographical sources of his thesis there is a manuscript written by Prieto entitled “Les unités phonologiques”. In the introduction to the thesis, Prieto writes that the theoretical framework of his thesis is given by Trubetzkoy’s *Grundzüge* (he also refers to Jakobson and to Cantineau), but, additionally, he writes: “en esta descripción fonológica del español aplicamos por primera vez a una lengua particular las conclusiones de carácter teórico a las que llegamos en nuestro artículo sobre las unidades fonológicas” (‘in this phonological description of Spanish we apply to a particular language for the first time, the theoretical conclusions we reached in our article about the phonological units’). In the copy of his thesis held at the archives in Buenos Aires, there is a handwritten note, made by Prieto himself, which indicates that “Les unités phonologiques” is actually the article “Traits oppositionelles et Traits contrastifs”, published in *Word* in 1954. The main proposal of this article is the differentiation of syntagmatic versus paradigmatic features, an idea to which Prieto kept coming back throughout his career, and which was explored deeply by him, and applied to the description of the content plane, in his first book, *Principes de Noologie* (Prieto 1964). It is worth pointing out that already at this early stage of his career, Prieto was trapped between the seeming dialectics of center and periphery; while Córdoba rejected his phonological work, “Traits oppositionelles et Traits contrastifs” was very well

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<sup>24</sup> It is interesting to notice the remark that Prieto’s thesis, according to Krüger, could have been better if it were not for “the very nature of phonology”. This is what backs up our conjecture presented in the previous footnote.

received by André Martinet, and it became Prieto's entrance into the international scene of linguistics.

The first years of Prieto's career, roughly speaking from 1951 to 1960, are characterized by a profound attention to linguistics. The semiotic problems that will occupy the pages of Prieto's main oeuvres were still in a germinal form at this time, and they are not readily noticeable, but some lines of continuity can be established. Thus, for instance, "Traits oppositionnelles et Traits contrastifs" establishes the foundations for Prieto's discussion of the notion of "feature" and it problematizes the role of the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic within a language (i.e. within a *langue*). Both of these problems will be treated in *Principes de Noologie*, but, importantly, they will be at the center of two of articles written by Prieto at the end of the 80's, namely "Classe et concept, sur la pertinence et les rapports saussuriennes 'd'échange' et 'de comparaison'" and "Caractéristique et dimension, essai de définition de la syntaxe". Indeed, this continuity within Prieto's works accounts for the fact that many of his semiotic proposals are not fully understandable without his linguistic proposals, but at the same time, it is the centrality of semiotics in Prieto's thought, especially at the beginning of the 60's and onwards, which shapes his conception of both linguistics as a science, and of language as a research object. The articles included in this collection show some aspects of the continuity between the linguistic and the semiotic as conceived by Prieto. For now, let us simply take that continuity as an axis to tell the story of his academic life<sup>25</sup>.

## 5.2. A sojourn in Paris

In 1956, Prieto obtained a scholarship from the French government to study in Paris under the supervision of André Martinet. The road to Paris, however, was also filled with some unfortunate events. After finishing his doctoral thesis, Prieto obtained a position as Secretary of the Faculty of Philosophy and Humanities (the official designation, according to the documents in the University of Córdoba, was "Oficial 4o Secretario", Redard 1991 says that the position was equivalent to that of "chief of personnel"). Prieto worked as Secretary only nine months. However, this period coincided with the first period of Perón's presidency. When Prieto tried to apply to a competition for obtaining a professorship in general linguistics at the University, also in 1956, the new authorities, who were in line with Aramburu's government (which had overthrown Perón),

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<sup>25</sup> In regard to this strong continuity in Prieto's ideas, let us remember some words by Jean Claude Passeron: "Me retournant sur l'itinéraire intellectuel de Prieto j'admire d'abord l'impeccabilité de la ligne droite tout au long de laquelle, des *Principes de noologie* aux *Saggi di Semiotica*, il a construit son système sémiologique sur le développement implacablement cohérent de quelques principes ou axiomes." ("Thinking back on the intellectual route of Prieto, I admire, first of all, the impeccability of the straight line across which, from *Principes de Noologie* to *Saggi di Semiotica*, he built his semiological system by the persistent and coherent development of certain principles or axioms."), (Passeron 1998 :191).

decided to refuse Prieto the right to participate in the competition based on his presumed association with the Peronist movement (cf. Redard 1991).

In a document from April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1956, the authorities of the Faculty of Philosophy, represented by Víctor Massuh, who was *Delegado Interventor* in the Faculty, accused Prieto of adhering, and promoting “ideas related to a totalitarian spirit”. The accusation was made on the basis of documents that had been signed by Prieto while being Secretary. One of the documents contained quotations of Perón’s discourses, another was a decision to allow a speech about “The racial problem in the Americas” to be pronounced on October 17<sup>th</sup>, a foundational date for Peronism. In a letter addressed to Massuh, Prieto appealed the decision on the basis that his position as Secretary merely allowed him to endorse the decisions made by the Dean, and thus that, by signing, the Secretary can be held responsible only for the fact that “what is said in a given document really is what the Den/Delegate resolved”. Moreover, he pointed at the irregularity, and illegality, of the process that was being carried over against him, given

*el hecho de que en algunas Facultades continú[a]n en sus cargos Secretarios cuya designación es anterior a septiembre de 1955, este ultimo hecho prueba evidentemente que el haberse desempeñado como Secretario durante la dictadura no ha sido considerado como “acto positivo y ostensible de solidaridad con la dictadura” ni “que pruebe objetivamente la promoción de ideas totalitarias”<sup>26</sup>.*

the fact that in some faculties other Secretaries whose designations are prior to September 1955 are still in their charges, this [...] proves evidently that to have been Secretary during the dictatorship has not been considered as a “positive and ostensible act of solidarity with dictatorship” and it does not “objectively probe the diffusion of totalitarian ideas.

Prieto finished his appeal stating that he had provided proofs to show that the decision of eliminating him from the competition was not legal, and that he had never held beliefs against human dignity. A document from April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1956, confirmed the decision of eliminating Prieto from the competition.

Redard (1991) claims that the conflict with the University’s authorities was one of the reasons why Prieto decided to leave Córdoba<sup>27</sup>, and evidently his contact with Martinet, whom Prieto knew via written correspondence while Martinet was in New York, might have positively influenced the decision of leaving Argentina. This first sojourn in Paris undoubtedly marked the beginning of Prieto’s international scientific career, and it thus condemned him, since the very beginning, to incarnate Simmel’s stranger – this is one of the two reasons

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<sup>26</sup> Extract taken from Prieto’s letter to Victor Massuh, dated April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1956.

<sup>27</sup> He, however, remained an employee of the University, and his stay in Paris was considered a license, unlike 10 years later when he was officially expelled and fired from the University.

that drove me to choose the epigraph I chose for this text (the other reason will come almost at the end of this story).

Prieto travelled to France funded by a scholarship from the French government. The scholarship for Paris was granted for the academic year 1956–1957 (namely October 1956 to April 1957), and after that Prieto received an *allocation de recherches* from the Centre National de la Recherche (CNRS) that lasted until July 1960. The work Prieto produced while in Paris marked a progressive shift from phonology to semantics and eventually semiotics (or rather, *semiology*). Nevertheless, it is important to notice that even if Prieto turned towards the analysis of the content plane, he never stopped going back to define and revise the conceptual apparatus used in the analysis of the expression plane. The article “Contributions à l’étude fonctionnelle du contenu” published also in 1956, and in which Prieto’s adscription is still “Universidad Nacional de Córdoba”, provides a very good example of this; in this article, Prieto deals with a *langue*’s system of “pleremes”, and thus accordingly of “plerology”<sup>28</sup>, but in defining the “plereme” he revises the definition of phoneme.

The articles Prieto published between 1956 and 1964, when *Principes de Noologie*, Prieto’s first book, was published, mostly deal with the problems of analyzing the content plane. It is interesting to notice, however, that the use of set theory, or logic of classes<sup>29</sup>, which will become the most characteristic trait of Prieto’s thinking, only appears, in its fully fledged form, precisely in the *Principes*, but none of the articles published prior to 1964 make active use

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<sup>28</sup> “Plerology”, or “plerematics” is a Hjelmslevian term for the study of the entities of content plane. It is interesting to notice that Prieto did not use the corresponding “ceneme” or “cenematics”, for the expression plane, and that he explicitly states his dissatisfaction with Hjelmslev’s terminology while accusing the Danish linguist of a “distrust” in substance (Prieto 1956: 23). Actually, the relationship between Prieto and Hjelmslev is very interesting. On the one hand, Prieto usually opposed his own views to Hjelmslev’s on the basis of an alleged “antisubstantialism” of the latter (influenced, perhaps, by Martinet’s review of the *Prolegomena*). However, it is easy to see that Prieto was heavily influenced by glossematics, and some similarities between his noology and Hjelmslev’s theory were readily pointed out by J. Kurylowicz when Prieto presented his notion of “noeme” in the IXth Congress of Linguists. E. Fadda has also stressed the links uniting both linguists by noticing that Prieto’s concept of “semiotic structure” was taken from Hjelmslev. Aside from Prieto reading Hjelmslev, it is certain that they did meet each other personally. The first encounter between the two of them was probably in Oslo in 1957 during the VIIIth International Congress of Linguists. I do not know, however, to what extent they interacted there. Interestingly enough, in 1987, Prieto cited Hjelmslev among his main sources of inspiration (Prieto 1987: 11).

<sup>29</sup> Prieto uses the term “logique des classes”, and never that of “théorie des ensembles”. I will therefore, throughout this text use “logic of classes”. The main source cited by Prieto in this regard, especially in the 60’s, is Russell and Whitehead’s *Principia Mathematica*. Perhaps this might explain why he didn’t speak of “théorie des ensembles” but of a “logique des classes”.

logic of classes<sup>30</sup>. In this regard, it should be pointed out that while at Paris, one of the classmates of Prieto was J.W.F. Mulder, the main proponent of axiomatic functionalism. Although Prieto never attempts to formalize his theory in the way axiomatic functionalism did, it is certainly worth noticing that both of these thinkers were studying under Martinet during the sixties<sup>31</sup>.

Additionally, it was also during this period when Prieto read Éric Buyskens's *Les langages et le discours*. In fact, it is in the early 60's when Buyskens' influence on him begins to show up in his writings, especially after 1964. In our talks, Pellegrino once told me that while Prieto surely read Buyskens because of Martinet – they knew each other, and probably Martinet introduced Buyskens to Prieto both personally and theoretically –, Prieto saw Buyskens' ideas more as a confirmation of his own than as a proper discovery. Yet, Buyskens' work, especially the 1943 edition, was to become central for the subsequent development of Prieto's theory and references to him are easily found throughout Prieto's texts.

Now, allow us a small digression. The conspicuousness of Buyskens in Prieto's works is worth noticing given that, as anybody who has read Prieto will know, he did not cite others consistently. To be fair, the usual references in his works are mostly to linguists, and thus we can be certain, for instance, that he knew Cantineau, Gardiner, Saussure, Hjelmslev, etc. But, outside the usual works that constitute his body of references, even if one could easily speculate about Prieto having read Peirce, Lacan, Freud, or even Lotman, or some specific books by Eco, his writings do not provide us with any direct evidence of it. There certainly are other authors that we can know for a fact that were read by Prieto, to the extent that he refers to their works, for instance, Russell and Whitehead, Tarski, Piaget, Bourdieu, Marx, and Althusser. This digression is needed precisely at this point of our story because the next pages of these notes on Prieto's intellectual biography will be dealing with an "expansion" of Prieto's theoretical aims whereby his concerns were extended beyond the field of linguistics. As a matter of fact, Prieto himself stated in an interview with Omar Calabrese (Calabrese 1976), when asked about his transition from linguistics to semiology, that such transition was

*inseparabile dalla mia progressiva presa di coscienza politica. C'è stato certo un momento in cui, a causa appunto di questa presa di coscienza, la linguistica, nei suoi orientamenti puramente eruditi, mi è diventata insopportabile. Ma è precisamente perché mi sono accorto in tempo delle possibilità*

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<sup>30</sup> The article "¿Qué es la lingüística funcional?" originally published in 1962, does use the term "class", but it is not used to the same extent, and in the same way, as it will be used in Prieto's works after 1964.

<sup>31</sup> Indeed, it would be interesting to compare the use of set theoretical principles that each of the authors made for explaining phonological problems. It is also interesting to notice that Prieto and Mulder virtually never referred to each other's work. However, some works of S. Hervey, a close collaborator of Mulder, do treat and refer to Prieto's ideas (e.g. Hervey 2000).

*enormi che ci sono, attraverso la semiologia, di sfruttare la linguistica per una migliore comprensione dei fenomeni sociali, che sono riuscito ad evitare una crisi personale.*

inseparable from the progressive growth of my political awareness. There was a moment in which, because of this political awareness, linguistics in its purely erudite orientation became unbearable for me. But it was precisely because I realized, at the right moment, of the enormous possibilities that there are, via semiology, of using linguistics to better understand social phenomena, that I succeeded in avoiding a personal crisis.

Later, we will see the implications of Prieto's political awareness in his theorizing. For now, let me just note that my original aim when writing these notes, and to some extent when writing this dissertation, was to reconstruct the intellectual path followed by Prieto in the development of his ideas, but soon enough I realized the impossibility of completing such a task: I can only offer but an approximation to such reconstruction. In a personal conversation with Claudia Quijano, Prieto's last student in Geneva, she told me that he "...*would read a lot, and when he came across an idea he liked, he would cherish it and develop it on his own until the idea became something new, something that was his, and then, he would not try to remember where, or who, did he get the idea from, he would rather often try to forget it*". I would only hope that the ambiguity and the speculation to which such facts can invite will render the reader more avid to engage directly with Prieto's own texts. Let us now return to the matter of our concern.

So, in the second half of the fifties Prieto had gone to Paris. All his time in Paris was spent at the École des Hautes Études, and during the four years he stayed there, he prepared a text that was to be presented as a *mémoire*. It was this text precisely that would eventually become *Principes de Noologie*, Prieto's first book. Jeanne Martinet tells us that when the text was presented to the faculty "it was rejected by a jury presided over by Emile Benveniste" (1990:89). It seemed that fate wanted Prieto to return to his austral motherland, for in April of 1959, he applied again, from Paris, to a professorship in Córdoba. Thus he flew back to Argentina in order to present his exams, which took place on the 13<sup>th</sup> of July. The examination consisted mainly in a lecture, dictated by Prieto, which developed in two parts. The first part was an exposition on phonetics and phonology, and the second part was devoted to morphology and syntax. The jury approved of Prieto and recommended him for the professorship and for a position of full-time researcher. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of December of that same year, the decision of granting Prieto the professorship was issued by the University of Córdoba. Prieto, who had come back to France after the examination, received the notice and asked the University in Córdoba permission to remain in France until the completion of his work (that is, the manuscript that the Benveniste-presided jury would reject).

In a letter dated February 2<sup>nd</sup> of 1960, and which was addressed to the Faculty of Philosophy and Humanities of the National University of Córdoba,

Prieto writes that he needs to remain in France until July, and then he quotes Martinet's report to the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in which Martinet calls Prieto's work "*una etapa decisiva de la investigación lingüística que, actualmente, sólo el Sr. Prieto, por su capacidad y sus antecedentes, puede llevar a cabo*" ('a decisive stage in linguistic research, which, currently, only Mr. Prieto, for his capacities and background, is able to carry on')<sup>32</sup>.

Prieto was then able to stay in France for six more months, but what was to be of the manuscript under preparation? *Principes de Noologie* would only become a publishable book in 1962, as attested to by the research report Prieto presented to the University of Córdoba in 1963. Jeanne Martinet has stated that the delay with which *Principes de Noologie* appeared was due to the "startling originality of his approach", and it gives the impression that such delay was due, in part, to Benveniste, at least inasmuch as he presided over the jury that rejected the text. However, when Prieto applied for his Professorship in Córdoba, he sent along with his application two recommendation letters, which I reproduced here. One was signed by A. Martinet, and the other by Benveniste himself.

Here is Martinet's letter, dated Paris, February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1960.

*Monsieur le Doyen,*

*Il y a près de huit ans que je suis avec un vif intérêt les recherches poursuivies par Monsieur Luis Prieto dans le domaine de la linguistique générale. Depuis son arrivée à Paris, il y a presque quatre ans, il a consacré tout son temps à la préparation et à la rédaction d'un ouvrage sur l'analyse du contenu linguistique qui sera, j'ose dès maintenant l'affirmer, un livre que fera date dans l'histoire de notre discipline.*

*Je me permets de féliciter l'Université de Córdoba d'avoir su s'attacher une personnalité scientifique de cette valeur, et je vous serais personnellement reconnaissant, Monsieur le Doyen, de tout faire pour que Monsieur Prieto puisse disposer de tout le temps nécessaire pour la poursuite de recherches d'une importance toute particulière et qu'il est seul, pour l'instant, à pouvoir mener avec une complète maîtrise.*

*Veillez, je vous prie, agréer Monsieur le Doyen, l'expression de mes sentiments très distingués.*

*André Martinet*

To the Dean,

It has been nearly eight years since I followed with a lively interest the investigations pursued by Mr. Luis Prieto in the domain of general linguistics. After his arrival to Paris, almost four years ago, he has devoted his whole time to the preparation and writing of a work about the analysis of linguistic content which will be, I dare to say already, a book that will mark a date to remember in the history of our discipline.

I allow myself to congratulate the University of Córdoba for having the good sense to hire a scientific personality of such value, and I would be

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<sup>32</sup> The letter quotes Martinet in Spanish, certainly translated from French by Prieto.

personally grateful, Mister Dean, if you were to do everything in your power to allow Mr. Prieto to have all the necessary time to pursue investigations of a remarkable importance and which he alone, at the moment, has been able to finish with complete mastery.

Please add, Mister Dean, the expression of my most distinguished sentiments.

André Martinet.

Here is Benveniste's letter, dated Paris, February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1960.

*J'ai suivi depuis trois ans le travail de M. Prieto et je puis témoigner des qualités qu'il a montrées dans la préparation du mémoire qu'il destine à l'École des Hautes Études. M. Prieto est animé d'une grande ardeur dans la recherche scientifique et il tente des voies qui n'ont pas encore été explorées.*

*L'originalité de sa méthode permet d'attendre de lui des travaux de valeur.*

*Je souhaite vivement que M. Prieto puisse, dans la carrière qu'il aborde, se consacrer entièrement au travail scientifique et développer librement des recherches auxquelles il s'est voué.*

*E. Benveniste*

I have followed for three years the work of Mr. Prieto, and I could see the qualities that he has showed during the preparation of the memoire he has prepared for the École des Hautes Études. Mr. Prieto is infused with a great enthusiasm in scientific research and he lays paths that have not been yet explored.

The originality of his method allows expecting from him works of great value.

I strongly wish that Mr. Prieto can, in the career he will follow, devote himself entirely to scientific work and to freely develop the investigations he wishes to follow.

E. Benveniste.

It can be argued that Benveniste is praising Prieto in his letter, and one could ask if, actually, Prieto's text was rejected by the jury in spite of it being presided by Benveniste. In any case, the relationship between Benveniste and Prieto does not seem to be of much more importance, from the point of view of this intellectual biography. One could still wonder, on the face of what we have said before about Prieto's scarce references, if some ideas of his were reactions to, or endorsements of, Benveniste's own proposals, but, as of now, we cannot say anything for sure.

The four years Prieto spent in Paris were devoted to the construction of the semantic theory presented in the *Principes de Noologie*, and thus, they could be classified as pertaining to the linguistic-oriented years of Prieto's research. However, the fact that Prieto built his semantics on the basis of Buysens' semic act, hence considering linguistic communication as a specific case within the whole set of communicational practices, was already pointing at the need for developing a semiological theory that would extend beyond merely linguistic

communication. In fact, the work for Prieto's article "La sémiologie", which provided a sort of blueprint for Prieto's second book, began already at the end of the 50's. When the article was published, in 1968, the introduction was changed to include recent developments in the field – namely, some references to Barthes' works, and the distinction between his approach and that of Mounin, Buysens and Prieto himself – but the rest of the article was already foretelling the direction Prieto's research was going to take.

### 5.3. The late Córdoba years

One year after his return from France, Prieto became head of the Department of Languages (in Spanish, "Departamento de Letras", the resolution was made on December 14<sup>th</sup> 1961). The years spent in Córdoba after his return from France were highly productive, and the outcome of his research became more and more directed upon general linguistics and semiology proper. During these six years, Prieto was also often travelling and attending congresses both in the Americas and in Europe. The archives in Córdoba include his research reports from the years 1962 to 1966, and thus we can have a good idea of how his ideas were developing.

The activities carried out during 1962 according to the research reports included the following. Prieto informs that he finished the writing of *Principes de Noologie*, and he adds that this work had been presented to the École des Hautes Études. He also reports that he was working on a paper about 'modern linguistics and the teaching of living languages'), that he had begun working on the semiology of writing, and that two articles concerning this topic were under preparation. Looking at Prieto's bibliography, it seems that these articles were either not published right away or not published at all. It could be the case that the articles on writing were included, even if only partially, in the article "La sémiologie", which Prieto mostly finished writing in 1961 (Prieto 1977:131), but which was only published in 1968 – mostly because it was included in a collective book edited by A. Martinet<sup>33</sup>. In what concerns his teaching activities, Prieto mentions that he taught a seminar on the semiology of writing. In fact, Prieto showed a constant interest in writing, and in some papers he treated the problem of how to give a semiotic account of writing systems, yet, the pieces where he only talked about writing were only published later in his career.

The research report concerning Prieto's activities during 1963 is a bit more enlightening. His teaching activities consisted mainly in teaching three courses. First, a course on General Linguistics, focused on his noology proposal, and in which he tackled mostly the problem of defining "word" as a linguistic category. Second, a course (in the research report it is properly listed as a seminar)

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<sup>33</sup> The book was *Le langage*, and it was a volume of the *Encyclopédie de la Pléiade*. The other contributors were B. Mandelbroit, E. Buysens, P. Guiraud, among others.

which bore the title “*Análisis crítico de los ‘Eléments de linguistique générale’, 3r. capítulo (Les unités significatives) de A. Martinet*” (‘A critical analysis of the third chapter (“Les unités significatives”) of Martinet’s *Eléments de linguistique générale*’). And finally, a small course on the translation of linguistics’ works from French to Spanish.

The research for that year deserves some comments. Firstly, Prieto mentions that he presented a work titled “Significado y lingüística funcional” (‘Meaning and functional linguistics’) during the *Primera reunion lingüística y filológica de América Latina* (‘First Linguistic and Philological Meeting in Latin America’), which was held in Chile. The paper, says Prieto, was going to be published in the proceedings of the event. Yet, from Prieto’s bibliography one can gather that this paper was not published. He also informs that he concluded a work entitled “Crítica del ‘triángulo’ de Ogden y Richards y de su aplicación en semántica por S. Ullmann” (‘A critique of Ogden and Richards ‘triangle’ and its application in semantics by S. Ullman’). This paper was presented in a congress in Tucumán, and according to the report, it was being translated (Prieto does not specify into which language) in order to be published in the *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* on the petition of K. Baldinger. This particular text, it seems, was going to remain unpublished too. Yet, in Prieto’s bibliography we do find a published a review of Ullman’s *The Principles of Semantics, a Linguistic Approach to Meaning* in the journal *Roman Philology*. This review, however, was published in 1960, so it cannot be the same text Prieto talks about in his report. Probably the review included some ideas of the paper presented in Tucumán, because the review – which was, by the way, published in Spanish<sup>34</sup> – does contain a critique of Ogden and Richards triangle: Prieto sees as an inconsistency in Ullman’s proposal that the criteria for differentiating between object and referent are not applied in the same way (*mutatis mutandis*) to the sign vehicle, for, he thinks, were that to be done, an analogous distinction could be obtained. The ideas Prieto presents in that review

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<sup>34</sup> It is worth noticing that the text was originally published in Spanish given that, despite being a native Spanish speaker, Prieto published very little in his mother tongue. Among his books, only two of them (*Mensajes y Señales* and *Estudios de lingüística y semiología generales*) are translated into Spanish (the Spanish edition of *Pertinence et pratique* was apparently done without the involvement of Prieto, and he stated that it had so many mistakes that it was unfeasible to use it. A small glance into the book confirms Prieto’s views. In Buenos Aires, there is a document containing the errata Prieto found in the first twenty pages of the book). Some articles of his were also translated into Spanish but, as can be seen from his bibliography (see Redard 1991), only a handful of articles were originally written directly in Spanish (perhaps the most important being “Decisión y Sujeto”, which was published originally in Spanish, and then translated into German and Italian). Apparently, at least at the beginning of his career, Prieto would write in Spanish and then translate his texts into French, the French versions being usually the ones that were published. As for the languages in which Prieto most often published, they were French and Italian. There are only two or three works of his in English and some works in German (in fact, the most relevant English texts of Prieto are his entries for Sebeok’s *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics*).

are somewhat reminiscent of some of the core proposals of *Principes de Noologie*, and of another article Prieto published in 1960, “À propos de la commutation”, but this just bespeaks the strong unity one can find within his oeuvre.

The report for 1963 continues with Prieto informing that he continued working in the following topics: ‘Writing from a semiological point of view’, ‘Problems regarding the first linguistic articulation’, ‘The application of the logic of classes for solving linguistic problems’ and ‘other less important topics’, he adds. It is very interesting to find that the report finishes with Prieto mentioning that he began writing an ‘Introduction to general linguistics’, and that he expects the book to be finished at some point of 1964. This “introduction to general linguistics” would become *Messages et Signaux*, Prieto’s second book, and his main work in what concerns a “semiology of communication”, or what could be called a “theory of codes”<sup>35</sup>. Finally, from the report we can also gather that during 1963 Prieto travelled to Mexico, the United States and some places within Argentina to attend academic congresses.

The activities for the following year, that is, those included in his report covering 1964, consisted in the following. Regarding teaching, the first semester of the year saw Prieto dictating his regular lecture on general linguistics (the topic is not specified this time), and a seminar on ‘the use of the logic of classes for the study of some problems of general linguistics’. For the second semester, we find that he dictated a grammar seminar (also without further specification about the topic), and another seminar on general linguistics on the topic ‘function and economy in language’. This latter seminar, Prieto explains, was open at the request of philosophy students, and was also attended by, then Professor at Córdoba, Ezra Heymann.

Regarding research, Prieto says that the two main topics he was engaged with during 1964 were: the determination of the theoretical foundations of the functional method, and the analysis of the notion of linguistic “articulation” and its relations with the economy and the functioning of language. The conclusions to which he arrived through his teaching and research were to be published in three articles. Let us also comment about these texts. The three articles were: a text that was to appear as the prologue to the Spanish translation of Trubetzkoy’s *Grundzüge der phonologie*; a text called “La langue et les parlants”, and an article for *La linguistique* entitled “Fonction et économie”. Of these three papers, the second and the third were indeed published. “La langue et les parlants” was published in 1967<sup>36</sup>, and “Fonction et économie” was published in 1965. This last work contains some of the theoretical ideas that Prieto was going to present in more detail in *Messages et Signaux*. As for the first text, the prologue to Trubetzkoy’s *Grundzüge*, it seems that it hides an interesting story. In the first place, the Spanish translation of Trubetzkoy’s book, which Prieto co-

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<sup>35</sup> In Chávez Barreto 2020: 237–238 one can find some small excerpts of Prieto’s research reports, concerning *Messages et Signaux*. As for the equation between “theory of codes” and “semiology of communication” see footnote 6 of section 4 of this work.

<sup>36</sup> In *L’Aventure humaine, Encyclopédie des sciences de l’homme: vol. L’homme et les autres*, Paris, Ed. de la Grange-Batelière

edited with Delia García Giordano who was the translator, appeared only in 1973. This book did include a prologue by Prieto, and the prologue is, indeed, to some extent at least, about the foundations of the functional method and, to a larger extent, about the application of the logic of classes to some problems of general linguistics, a topic that occupied Prieto's teaching in the second half of 1963. What makes matters slightly tricky is that the prologue to Trubetzkoy's *Grundzüge* seems to be a reworking of a text Prieto published in 1969, and which title bespeaks the orientation that Prieto's theory was about to take at the turn of the decade: "La découverte du phonème, Interpretation épistémologique"<sup>37</sup>. There are, certainly, some differences between the text from 1969 and the Spanish prologue of 1973. The text from 1969 seems broader in scope, while the prologue from 1973, titled "Consideraciones sobre la fonología" ('Observations on phonology') is directly concerned with the notion of "class" as applied to phonology. In 1975, when Prieto published *Essais de linguistique et sémiologie générales*, mostly a collection of his main works to that year, he included the prologue from 1973, instead of the paper from 1969, but it is in the text from 1969 where, it could be argued, one finds for the first time the seeds of what was going to properly become Prieto's semiotic theory, that is to say, the *sémiologie* he would define in 1987 as 'the study of the *raison d'être* of knowledge'.

The report of 1964 continues with a further mention of the work Prieto was doing for his treatise of semiology; interestingly, he no longer refers to this book as an "introduction to general linguistics", and he says the book will be published both in French and Spanish. Finally, he also writes that two of his works were published in 1964: *Principes de Noologie*, and the article "La notion de noème", which appeared in the Proceedings of the 9<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Linguists.

As the first half of the decade was about to finish, we see Prieto's involvement with semiotics only increasing. His teaching activities during 1965 included, during the first semester, his regular lecture on general linguistics (the topic is not specified in the report) and a seminar on "Writing as a semiological problem". The second semester included three seminars: "Initiation to diachronic linguistics", "The semiology of Roland Barthes", and a grammar seminar (also with an unspecified topic). He also reports to have been supervising Alicia Poloniato in her research on "The functional study of intonation".

His research activities, he writes, "estuv[ieron] consagradas casi enteramente a terminar la redacción [...] a terminar la redacción de un tratado de semiología que servirá como texto de base al curso de Lingüística general" ('were mostly devoted to finishing the writing of a treatise of semiology that will serve as the base text for the course in general linguistics'). This treatise of semiology was finished in December of 1965, and by the time Prieto wrote his report, which was March of 1966, the book was already in the process of being

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<sup>37</sup> This text was included as an appendix to the Italian translation of *Messages et Signaux*, published in 1971.

published, both in French (by the Presses Universitaires de France) and in Spanish (by Seix Barral). This book, we can be totally certain, is *Messages et Signaux*. It was published in French in 1966, the Spanish edition appeared in 1967 and it was translated by César Ulises Guiñazú with the collaboration of Prieto himself. The book would be also translated throughout the years into the following languages Polish (1970), Italian (1971), German (1972), Portuguese (1973), Japanese (1974), and Greek (1984). It is worth noticing that no English translation was made.

Three months after Prieto wrote his report, in June of 1966, Argentina was to become the stage of a major event that would change the course of its history and, consequently, of the history of Prieto's life. In June 28<sup>th</sup>, the military forces lead by Juan Carlos Onganía overthrew Arturo Illia's government. This day marked the beginning of what was then called the "Argentinean Revolution", a military dictatorship that was to last until 1973. As it was, sadly, usual in the region, the installment of a dictatorial government brought with it extreme exhibitions of violence and repression upon students' movements and associations, as well as upon the universities themselves. A month after Onganía seized power, an event known as "La noche de los bastones largos" ('the night of the long batons') took place in Buenos Aires. The new government ransacked five faculties of the University and chucked out students, professors and staff from them. That night marked the beginning of the government's intervention in the academic life. In the coming months, around three hundred professors would either leave their jobs or be expelled from their institutions.

The turmoil was promptly felt in Córdoba and the consequences were as dire as in the capital. Caught up in between the protests and administrative technicalities, Prieto and some of his colleagues were accused of breaching their contractual obligations when they refused to go back to teaching. The professors claimed that it was not possible to return to classes given the current circumstances, and that to do so would be unethical. The University's authorities limited themselves to label the professors as rebels. In November of 1966, Prieto was expelled from the University, losing practically all his academic positions<sup>38</sup>.

#### **5.4. A long way from home: from Buenos Aires to Algiers to Paris**

The Córdoba archives include Prieto's projected research activities that were to be carried out during 1966, and the document also includes the activities he carried out in the first half of the year. During the first semester, Prieto was

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<sup>38</sup> The University's resolution file in which it is established that Prieto be expelled from the institution is dated November 7<sup>th</sup>, 1966. In the document it is stated that along with Prieto, Prof. María Esther Saleme de Burnichon, Prof. Noé Jitrik, Prof. José Cruz, and Prof. Víctor Nuñez Regueiro, were also fired. Prof. Paulino Moscovich was suspended until 1968.

teaching his lecture in general linguistics and a seminar on ‘Some problems of general linguistics’. The problems included in the seminar were that of ‘the zero sign, the “word” unit, the notion of feature, the partial first and second articulations’, among others. As for future activities, he writes that two articles based on his presentation at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Latin-American Congress of Linguistics and Philology in Montevideo were being prepared. By the titles he gives in the program, “Señal y concepción de mundo” (‘Signal and worldview’) and “Langue et connotation”, it seems that Prieto either did not publish the first one, or he published it under a different title. In the case of “Langue et connotation”, however, there are two entries in Prieto’s bibliography that can be considered as the published version of it. They are basically the same article, but published in French as “Langue et style” (published in *La linguistique*) and in Spanish as “Lenguaje y connotación”. They were both published in 1969. The Spanish version was published in the proceedings of a congress called “Teoría de la comunicación y modelos lingüísticos sociales” (‘Communication theory and social linguistic models’) held in Buenos Aires during October, 1967. The proceedings were edited by Eliseo Verón, one of the most prominent figures in Argentinean semiotics. Prieto also mentions that he was working together with Graciela Alisedo, who was apparently one of his doctoral students, on a book about ‘writing as a semiological system’. The book was supposed to be entitled *Las lenguas gráficas* (‘Graphic languages’) and it was projected to appear in French, published by the Presses Universitaires de France. Sadly, this project was never finished. Among his other doctoral students, Prieto mentions Alicia Poloniato, who was working, as we already know from his previous report, on intonation from a functional point of view, and on the distinction opposition-contrast in the expression plane; he also mentions Omar González, from Colombia, who was studying ‘the semiology of animal communication’. It is unfortunate that we couldn’t gather any more information on these students, or their research.

After his expulsion from Córdoba, Prieto moved to Buenos Aires, and he stayed there for apparently almost a year. In Buenos Aires, Prieto was mostly working as a private tutor (Redard 1991:5) and it was during this time that he established some important contacts both with psychoanalysts and with psychoanalysis as such. We know that these contacts were influential for his academic life, as he would eventually collaborate in a book about semiology and psychoanalysis entitled *Sémiologie psychanalytique* written by Carmen Gear and Ernesto Liendo. This book was published only in 1975, the same year in which Prieto published *Pertinence et pratique*. This is worth noticing, for it is in this particular book where Prieto first thematizes the problem of subjectivity, and, as we will later see, psychoanalysis was, for him, mostly a theory of the subject. Additionally, in 1985, when Prieto published “Decisión y Sujeto” (‘Decision and subject’) in an issue of *Psicoanálisis*, the journal of the Psychoanalytic Association of Buenos Aires, dedicated to David Liberman, he noted that indeed, during 1968, he was teaching semiotics to Liberman and other psychoanalysts. The period in Buenos Aires culminated when, at the end

of 1967<sup>39</sup>, Prieto was appointed to the chair of General Linguistics at the University of Algiers.

The stay of Prieto in Africa was rather short but quite successful from an intellectual point of view. It was there, in Algiers, where he met Jean Claude Passeron<sup>40</sup>, who is well known for having worked alongside Pierre Bordieu. Passeron and Prieto became good friends, as can be attested to by the beautiful text Passeron published in the issue of *Semiotica* that was dedicated to Prieto. In 1969, or rather in late 1968, Passeron helped Prieto to obtain a position in the Department of Sociology of the newly created Centre universitaire expérimental de Vincennes. One can only imagine how wonderful an experience this must have been for Prieto. The new university in Vincennes included in its staff names like Michael Foucault, Alain Badiou, and Gilles Deleuze.

### 5.5. Imaginez cette chance pour Genève!

In fact, the year 1969 was very favorable for Prieto. Not far away from the vibrant scene in Vincennes, Henri Frei was about to leave the Chair in General Linguistics that was once occupied by Ferdinand de Saussure. Apparently, it was the one and only Thomas A. Sebeok who suggested Robert Godel to offer the position to Prieto (according to Pellegrino 1998: 165). On February 27, 1969, a proposition was made to the University of Geneva, signed by the then dean of the Faculty of Languages (Faculté des Lettres) Bernard Gagnebin. It is worth reproducing some excerpts of it.

[...] *Des sondages ont été effectués auprès de plusieurs grands linguistes européens qui tous disposent d'instituts, de personnel, de bibliothèques, de crédits que l'Université de Genève n'est pas en mesure d'offrir. L'une d'entre eux, toutefois, s'est déclaré d'accord de venir à Genève sans exiger de locaux, de crédits spéciaux, de secrétaires, etc., c'est M. L.J. Prieto [...].*

*M. Prieto est considéré par les linguistes comme un des espoirs de la linguistique contemporaine, car il a ouvert des voies nouvelles à la linguistique par ses Principes de Noologie et son ouvrage déjà traduit en six langues sur Messages et Signaux.*

*La Faculté propose de nommer par appel le professeur L.J. Prieto, professeur à l'Université de Cordoba, puis d'Alger, actuellement au Centre universitaire de Vincennes, professeur de linguistique générale à notre Université.*

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<sup>39</sup> This period of Prieto's life can be a bit confusing in the different sources we have that tell a little bit of Prieto's life (mostly Redard 1991, J. Martinet 1989, and to some extent Pellegrino 1998, Krampen 1998 and Passeron 1998). The more reliable sources are, of course, the archive material. Thus, we are confident that Prieto was appointed to Algiers in 1967 because of a CV of Prieto held at the University of Geneva. Therein it is written: "Professeur de Linguistique générale l'Université d'Alger, 1967–1968".

<sup>40</sup> Passeron (1998:183) claims that he 'met Prieto in 1970 at Algiers, where Prieto taught for several years'. This must be attributed to some mistake on the side of Passeron. According to Redard (1991:5), it was Passeron, as we will see, who helped Prieto to get a position in Vincennes, in 1969! Moreover, see the previous footnote.

Surveys have been carried out among the most prominent European linguists, all of whom have institutes, staff, libraries and credits at their disposal, and the University of Geneva is not able to offer such benefits. One of them, however, has agreed to come to Geneva without requesting an office, special credits, secretaries, etc., and that was M. Luis J. Prieto [...]

M. Prieto is considered by linguists as one of the hopes of contemporary linguistics, given that he has opened new ways for linguistics with his *Principes de Noologie* and his work, already translated in six languages, *Messages et Signaux*.

The Faculty proposes to appoint by nomination Professor Luis J. Prieto, professor at the University of Córdoba, later at Alger, and currently at the Centre universitaire de Vincennes, professor of general linguistics at our university.

Prieto began working in Geneva in October of 1969, but he continued giving lectures in Vincennes for three more years. The archives in Geneva contain four research reports by Prieto from 1969 to 1988. The reports cover those years in this way: there is a first report from 1969 to 1976, a second one from 1974 to 1979, a third one from 1969 to 1983, and a fourth one from 1981 to 1988<sup>41</sup>. The archives also include reports of Prieto's visits to other universities during the years 1984 to 1985 and 1991 to 1992. Not all the documents are as detailed as the ones in Córdoba, but they do throw some light on Prieto's academic life in Switzerland.

Let us then go through the research reports. In the first report, the one covering the years 1969 to 1976 Prieto writes that, concerning his scientific activity, he devoted his work to four main topics. These were: determining the cognitive processes implicated in communication; the re-formulation of some basic epistemological notions in order to adapt them better to linguistics and semiotics; the definition of the object of linguistics and its comparison with other sciences of man, and, finally; the parallelism between signal and instrument. Additionally, he writes that this work has enabled him to create new foundations upon which purely linguistic topics were examined. The topics he mentions are those of syntax and translation. Prieto's works published during these seven years include a wide range of subjects that could fall into some of the four major topics he mentions in the report. There is, of course, "La découverte du phonème", a text we have already mentioned, which certainly deals with some epistemological notions, or rather epistemological problems, and treats them from a linguistic-semiological basis, but there is also the text "Structure Oppositionnelle et Structure sémiotique", published precisely in 1976, in volume 14 of the *Cahiers Vilfredo Pareto* that commemorated the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday of J. Piaget. Overall, this text seems to be a stand-alone presentation of some of the core theoretical principles of *Pertinence et pratique*'s third chapter

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<sup>41</sup> The ordering of the reports we have made here corresponds to the year in which they were made, namely, the last year of the report. Thus, the first report is the one from 1976, the second, the one from 1979, and so on.

(which deals with distinguishing between *langue* and *parole*), namely the difference between oppositional structures, or “classification systems”, and semiotic structures, i.e. the way in which classification systems relate to each other in bi-facial sign systems, but also what Prieto calls the centrifugal and centripetal aspects of knowledge, namely, the notion of difference and that of characteristic. These principles impact on the way Prieto defines the object of linguistics and its relations with other sciences of man, and they are, to some extent, to be found at the foundation of his theory of instruments. Pertaining to this particular topic, in 1973 Prieto published the article “Signe et instrument”, which also relates to some proposals of *Pertinence et pratique*, especially in what concerns “connotation” and the characterization of the content plane as being governed by a connotative operation. It is important to notice that Prieto’s insistence on thinking of signs as analogous, in some regard, to instruments, has to do with his idea that knowledge is intrinsically linked with a practice, and not so much with reducing language, i.e. *langue*, to a communicative tool.

All these nuances are worth noticing because from 1969 onwards, or rather from the second half of the sixties onwards, the topics and the approach to them in Prieto’s work signal the beginning of a new period in the development of his theory, and this is more or less easily noticeable in the scope of the theory Prieto presents in *Pertinence et pratique*, which was published in 1975. In fact, it would seem that during the years between the publication of *Messages et Signaux* and *Pertinence et pratique*, Prieto began devoting more and more time to what could be called a “general semiology”, i.e. to merging together the two trends that were more or less identifiable in French speaking semiotics at the time, namely a “semiology of communication” (represented by Mounins, Buysens, and Prieto) and a “semiology of signification” (whose main representative was Barthes). Interestingly, his *Études de linguistique et sémiologie générales*, also published in 1975, include a paper precisely about this topic. The paper is aptly entitled “Sémiologie de la communication et sémiologie de la signification”, and it was first published in Italian as the preface to the Italian edition of *Messages et Signaux* (which, incidentally, was re titled as *Lineamenti de semiologia. Messagi e segnali*). The reproduction of this text in the *Études* includes a postface, wherein Prieto writes (Prieto 1975b :141),

*Moi-même, enfin, je m’occupe de plus en plus – et « officiellement » depuis 1967 – de problèmes relevant du domaine de la sémiologie de la signification. En fait mon dernier ouvrage, publié en 1966, clôt pour moi la période purement « communicative » (c’est-à-dire linguistique) et amorce en même temps, dans son « Introduction » et dans son paragraphe final, la discussion d’une problématique beaucoup plus ample.*

I myself have been occupied more and more – and “officially” after 1967 – of problems pertaining to the domain of semiology of signification. In fact, my last work, published in 1966, closed for me the purely “communicative” (that is to say linguistic) period and begins, at the same time, in its “Introduction” and in its last paragraph, the discussion of a much larger problem.

This report of the years 1969 to 1976 is a further testimony of the transition undergone by Prieto's theory. His projected activities for the coming years were also going in that direction, as he writes that he will devote his attention to some problems of cognition, in particular; the "solution of continuity" by means of which an object of knowledge can be recognized as 'the same', and he even writes that a book on this topic might be prepared. As we now know, this book never really came out, even if the topic itself was addressed in some of the articles that were to be included in his last opus: the three volumes of the *Saggi di Semiotica*<sup>42</sup>. Precisely, the problem of how does the subject establish a "solution of continuity" by means of which an object can be considered "the same", was a problem briefly tackled in *Pertinence et pratique*, but Prieto's final stance regarding it is to be found in the second volume of the *Saggi*, which bears the subtitle "*Sull'arte e sul soggetto*".

In this first report he also mentions that a new version of *Messages et Signaux* might be made, but apparently he couldn't find the time to do it. Finally, he finishes the report announcing the writing of three articles: one on translation, one on syntax and one on 'the notion of word'. His works on translation and on syntax were published several years later and included in the *Saggi*<sup>43</sup>. A whole work solely devoted to 'the notion of word' was, apparently, never really written by Prieto, but the problem of defining what is a word is indeed present, in one way or another, in many of his texts, beginning with "Traits oppositives et traits contrastifs" from 1954.

The second report simply includes a list of Prieto's publications up to 1979. Perhaps one of the most interesting publications from this period is "Entwurf einer allgemeinen Semiologie", published precisely in 1979 in the German journal *Zeitschrift für Semiotik*. The paper is especially interesting to us, firstly, because it explicitly speaks of a "general semiotics" already in the title, and secondly, because it seems to hide an interesting story. In Prieto's Buenos Aires' archives, there is an unpublished manuscript in English called "Definitions for a project in semiotics". The title might be slightly deceiving, but as one can intuit, this manuscript is a translation into English of "Entwurf einer allgemeinen Semiologie". A quick comparison of the opening paragraph confirms it. Here is the English manuscript

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<sup>42</sup> Prieto worked on a series of articles to be included in a fourth volume, but his demise prevented this volume be published (see Gambarara 1997).

<sup>43</sup> It was only in 1984 when the article "Sur la traduction" appeared in *Parallèles* no.7. A year before, he published "Semiologia della traduzione: Belle infedeli o brute fedeli" in *Rinascità*. As for his work on syntax, the paper "Caractéristique et dimension. Essai de définition de la syntaxe" appeared in 1988 in the *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* 42. Both works, the paper from *Parallèles* and the one from the *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* were included in the *Saggi di Semiotica*.

That which constitutes language are not the sounds and the things about which the speaker communicates using the sounds, but the manner in which he knows the sounds and things because he uses the sounds to communicate about the things. (Prieto 1979b<sup>44</sup>)

And here is the German paper,

*Sprache ist nicht durch die Laute konstituiert und nicht durch die Dinge, über die der Sprecher mit Hilfe der Laute kommuniziert, sondern vielmehr durch die Art und Weise, in welcher der Sprecher die Laute und die Dinge erkennt, weil er eben die Laute gebraucht, um über die Dinge zu kommunizieren.* (Prieto 1979a)

The remaining question is of course why this manuscript was not published and, perhaps more interestingly, why did Prieto decide to remove the “allgemeinen” from the English title? We cannot give an answer to the question of why it was not published. Regarding the title, as it turns out, we cannot really know if the “allgemeinen” was added to the German text or removed from the English manuscript, because it so happens that the text was originally written in French, and we couldn’t find the French manuscript in the Buenos Aires archives. The last page of the German paper reads: “Übersetzung aus dem Französischen von Cristoph Küper und Martin Krampen, durchgesehen vom Autor unter Mithilfe von Carl Russl und Roland Posner” (Prieto 1979b: 264). The English manuscript reads “translated from French by James C. Brown and Claire Forel, in collaboration with the author”. The text is, alongside the last chapter of *Pertinence et pratique* – which was actually Prieto’s talk at the first congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies at Milan in 1971<sup>45</sup> and leaving aside the notes Prieto would publish in non-academic journals – perhaps one of the more politically oriented and socially committed writings of his. The final paragraph of the text states:

the social role of (general) semiotics and of semiologies, in classist societies, is that of denouncing ideological knowledge.<sup>46</sup> (Prieto 1979b)

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<sup>44</sup> The English manuscript is not dated. We have entered the manuscript as Prieto 1979b simply because of the date of publication of the German text.

<sup>45</sup> The text was, accordingly, published in the proceedings of the congress, *Panorama sémiotique* that appeared in 1974. It was a revised version of this text what was included as the last chapter of *Pertinence et pratique*. A Spanish translation of the text appeared in *La palabra y el hombre*, no. 17, (a Mexican journal published by the University of Veracruz) in 1976, translated by Diana Galak, and with a small introductory note by Mario Ugarriga.

<sup>46</sup> In the German version: “Die soziale Funktion der Semiologie und der Semiologien besteht in Klassengesellschaften darin, ideologische Erkenntnisse bloßzulegen” (Prieto 1979a: 264). It is worth noticing that here, inversely to what happened with the title, the “general” is present in the English manuscript, and not in the German text.

Indeed, this is a claim Prieto would often make in the seventies, and it is a claim to which a large part of semiotics was trying to live up during those years. This is a further reason for trying to engage Prieto's theories with contemporary semiotics.

The third research report from Geneva covers the years 1969 to 1983. In very general lines Prieto explains in this report that his research during these years has consisted in tackling the following problems: the definition of syntax; the definition of "word"; communication as a practice, and in this regard, its differences with other practices, orders and replies as a transference of knowledge; the double conception of the sense in a semic act, and, in relation to this, the following topics: translation, writing, a semiological theory of practice, the semiotic aspects of the artistic phenomenon, and, finally, some problems of phonology, specially of phonological syntax. He adds that his work on syntax and on the definition of word enabled him to organize a seminar on "Syntax, semantics and morphology", and that the works on translation and writing were to be the basis of a course on applied linguistics. The research on communication as a practice, the double conception of sense and the semiological theory of practice allowed him to further develop his course "Langue et parole: l'objet de la linguistique". Interestingly, he also writes that during the academic year 1980–1981 he taught phonology concentrating on the "dimensions" of the phonic, which seems to be related with the ideas that would eventually be published in "Caractéristique et dimension" some five years later. In this report, however, Prieto does not mention that he would prepare an article on this topic, but the continuity between his concern with syntax and the final form his phonological ideas would take at the end of the 80's can be nevertheless appreciated, at least when retrospectively looking into the reports, from the point of view of "Caractéristique et dimension".

Concerning his other teaching activities, he reports having some doctoral students under supervision. One of them with an already defended dissertation, Claire-Lisse Bonnet, whose thesis bore the title "L'enfant et le symbolique". He also mentions Daniele Gambarara, who had not yet defended, but whose thesis on the "Problèmes théoriques de la diachronie linguistique" was advancing promisingly. The rest of the report presents an overview of other research activities. A small overview of the administrative positions he held up to that moment is given, and a succinct overview of the congresses in which he participated, mentioning by name only the Eleventh International Congress of Linguists and the First Congress of the International Association of Semiotic Studies. This part of the report includes a research plan for leave, during which Prieto would be away from Geneva – he would be working with Jean Claude Passeron at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, in Marseille, and with Alberto Camisassa and Giacomo Contri in Milan, where he attended seminars of the association *Il Lavoro psicoanalitico*. The aim of this leave was mainly the writing of a series of essays on the semiological problems of art. Finally, the report suggests Eric Wehrli as a substitute for Prieto's courses during his time in France, with the additional comment that Wehrli could be a good choice given

the fact that he was not a Saussurean, but a generativist, and thus it would give Prieto's students the chance to become more familiar with Chomsky's approach. It was during this leave that Prieto would write, as we will see later, "Decisión y Sujeto", his major work on the theory of the subject and, incidentally, his own take on psychoanalysis, as we will learn from his last report.

Finally, the fourth research report covers the years 1981 to 1988. There, Prieto lists the places where he has taught, while being employed at Geneva. The list includes New York, Florence, Marseille, Murcia, Cosenza, Berlin, Lausanne, and Urbino. The second part of the report is very telling of Prieto's theoretical orientations and of the aims of his research. We therefore reproduce some excerpts here.

*Dans le domaine strictement linguistique, et à part les problèmes de la communication et de la définition de l'objet de la linguistique, qui constituent pour moi des sujets permanents de recherche, je travaille surtout 1) à la théorie de la traduction et 2) à la définition de la syntaxe [...].*

*Suivant la tradition saussurienne, j'ai toujours placé mon travail de linguiste dans le cadre de la sémiologie. Cela m'a amené vers trois domaines d'étude qui concernent sans doute la langue mais dans lesquels celle-ci n'occupe pas la position centrale : la théorie de l'art, la psychanalyse (en entendant par là la théorie du sujet) et l'épistémologie et la théorie de la connaissance. Il ne s'agit nullement, dans cette extension de mon champ d'intérêt, d'« appliquer », dans un sens ou dans l'autre, une discipline à une autre : je n'« applique » pas la psychanalyse à l'étude de la langue pas plus que je n'« applique » la linguistique à l'étude de l'art, mais c'est bien par une évolution interne des problèmes relevant du domaine strict de la linguistique générale – en particulier les problèmes de la communication, de la pratique (communicative ou autre), de la connotation, de la norme, etc. –, que je parviens aux disciplines mentionnées.*

In the strictly linguistic field, and besides from the problems of communication and the from the definition of the object of linguistics, which constitute for me permanent topics of research, I have specially worked on 1) the theory of translation and 2) the definition of syntax [...].

Following the Saussurean tradition, I have always placed my work as a linguist within the frame of semiology. This has lead me into three fields of study that are certainly concerned with language, but in which it does not occupy a central position: a theory of art, psychoanalysis (understanding by it a theory of the subject) and epistemology, and a theory of knowledge. It is not my aim, in this extension of my field of interest, of "applying", in one or another sense, one discipline to another: I do not "apply" psychoanalysis to the study of language, in the same way that I do not "apply" linguistics to the study of art, but it is due to an internal evolution of problems pertaining to the proper domain of general linguistics –particularly the problems of communication, of practice (communicative or of any other kind), of connotation, of norm, etc – that I arrive to the said disciplines.

As it can be seen, these excerpts support the claim we have made before, in these notes to Prieto's intellectual biography, regarding his take on linguistics as framed "dans le cadre de la sémiologie". Additionally, they illustrate to what extent the broadening of the scope of his research was due, for Prieto himself, to the internal evolution of the theoretical problems with which he was working. The rest of this report includes a long list of publications, conferences and other administrative information.

Besides the research reports, there are in the Geneva archives two reports of the research leaves Prieto took during 1984 to 1985 and 1991 to 1992. The report on Prieto's activities during his leave from October of 1984 to March of 1985 – his leave was announced in the third research report that covered the years 1969 to 1983 – states that, as we already know, he devoted most of his work to the writing of a series of studies on the semiological problems related to art. Two works were completed, one about the identity of the work of art, and one on the phenomenon referred to by Barthes as "connotation" or "semantization of uses". The first work was published in 1985 as "Sull'identità dell'opera d'arte" in *Studi di estetica*. The second work, as we have said, was "Decisión y Sujeto". It is very interesting to see that in the reports Prieto explicitly links his work for this article to his treatment of some of the problems Barthes would treat under the rubric "connotation", which might not be immediately noticeable from reading the article. "Decisión y Sujeto" was published also in 1985 in *Psicoanálisis, Revista de la Asociación Psicoanalítica de Buenos Aires*. It is worth noticing that the German version of this paper, published the following year in *Zeitschrift für Semiotik*, bears the title "Subjekt und Entscheidung. Zur Rolle von Norm und Geschmack beim symbolischen Ueberleben". The remark introduced in the second part of the German title was absent from the Spanish title, but the content of the article is the same, and indeed, the article does present some foundations upon which a theory of "norm" and "taste" could have been developed.

The report of his leave from October 1991 to March 1992 contains some paragraphs that, because they clarify the exposition of Prieto's theoretical orientations and aims, we reproduce here.

*Depuis le précédent congé scientifique dont j'ai bénéficié je n'ai fait que poursuivre la tâche entreprise depuis ma nomination à Genève et, en réalité, depuis mes débuts comme chercheur, c'est-à-dire la tentative d'exploiter les virtualités à mon avis fondamentales pour la théorie de la connaissance (et donc pour la théorie de la langue, que constitue un cas particulier de connaissance) contenues dans l'enseignement de F. de Saussure tel qu'il apparaît certes dans le Cours mais aussi dans les travaux de R. Godel et dans la monumentale édition critique de R. Engler que ces travaux rendent possible. Ma tentative, dois-je ajouter encore pour être juste, est orientée par l'utilisation des idées saussuriennes faite par l'École de Prague et en particulier par son principal représentant N. S. Trubetzkoy.*

*L'apport essentiel de Saussure et de l'École de Prague à la théorie de la connaissance se trouve dans la notion de pertinence. Or, l'approfondissement*

*de cette notion explique l'orientation particulière qu'a prise mon travail pendant les six dernières années. La notion mentionnée est en effet liée à celle de pratique, et une pratique implique nécessairement l'intervention d'un sujet. C'est donc l'effort pour parvenir à une théorie du sujet (laquelle implique une théorie de l'objet) qui, pourrais-je dire, constitue l'élément nouveau de mon travail de ces dernières années. La théorie du sujet semble par ailleurs ouvrir des possibilités intéressantes pour la compréhension de certains phénomènes liés à l'art, possibilités que je n'ai pas manqué d'explicitier et de développer [...].*

After my previous scientific leave, I have been continuing the tasks I was carrying out since my nomination to Geneva and, indeed, since my beginnings as a researcher, that is to say, the effort to develop the potentialities, in my opinion, the fundamental ones, for the theory of knowledge (and thus for the theory of language, which constitutes a special kind of knowledge) contained within the teachings of F. de Saussure as they appear, certainly, in the *Cours* but also in the works of R. Godel and in the monumental critical edition of R. Engler made possible by such works. My attempts, I must add to be fair, are oriented by the usage of Saussurean ideas made by the Prague School and especially by its main representative N. S. Trubetzkoy.

The essential contribution of Saussure and the Prague School to the theory of knowledge is found in the notion of *pertinence*. The deep reflection upon this notion explains the particular orientation my work has taken in the last six years. The said notion is indeed linked to that of *practice*, and a practice necessarily involves the intervention of a *subject*. It is thus the effort to bring forward a theory of the subject (which implies a theory of the object) what, I could say, constitutes the new element of my work in the last years. The theory of the subject seems to open interesting possibilities for the understanding of certain phenomena linked to art, possibilities that I have tried to make explicit and to develop [...].

The fact that these lines were written in 1991 shows the strong continuity within Prieto's thought and testifies to the sense in which his theoretical aims were conceived as the result of the internal evolution of the problems he was studying. The document continues,

*La diversité objective des différents problèmes sur lesquels je travaille (dans ma pensée il n'y a évidemment pas de solution de continuité entre eux) et le degré d'avancement, parfois très distinct, que j'ai réussi dans leur étude respectif rendent impossible la présentation dans un ouvrage unitairement structuré de l'ensemble de ce que j'appellerai « ma » sémiologie et que je considère comme une réalisation fidèle du projet saussurien d'une telle discipline (plus fidèle en tout cas que les sémiologies qui concentrent leur attention sur le phénomène littéraire). C'est pourquoi j'ai entrepris depuis quelques années, en accord avec la maison d'édition Pratiche Editrice de Parme, la rédaction d'une série de textes (en italien), liés certes entre eux mais indépendants quant à leur structure, dans lesquels est exposé l'essentiel des problèmes sur lesquels je travaille.*

The objective diversity of the different problems with which I work (in my thinking there is not a solution of continuity among them) and the degree of development, sometimes to very different extents, that I have made in studying them turns impossible the presentation in a work structured as a unity of the whole of what I would call “my” semiology, and which I consider to be a faithful realization of the Saussurean project for such discipline (more faithful, in any case, than the semiologies which concentrate their attention in the literary phenomenon). This is why I have engaged, for some years now, in an agreement with the editorial house Pratiche Editrice of Parma to the writing of a series of texts (in Italian), that are certainly linked among them yet independent in their structures, and in which the essential aspects of the problems on which I work are exposed.

The texts that were to be published under Pratiche were none other than those constituting the *Saggi*. After this passage, Prieto lists some of the texts he wrote in the last decade and that were to be included in the first two volumes of the *Saggi*.

As for the leave itself, the research plan consisted in developing Prieto’s theory of knowledge in its relation to the linguistic signified. Thus, we can read,

*J’avais jusqu’ici utilisé pour le signifié la notion de « classe de classes » de la logique traditionnelle : cela me permettait de considérer que, de même que le signifiant est une classe de signaux, le signifié est une classe de sens et donc, puisque, le sens étant une connaissance, il est en définitive une classe, comme une classe de classes. Or, la notion mentionnée est avérée insuffisante pour le problème du rapport entre sens et signifié (elle est, me semble-il [sic – I.C.], inutilisable aussi en logique, mais cela n’est pas ici mon affaire). Ce que je me propose d’étudier pendant le congé qui me serait éventuellement accordé c’est ce que j’appelle (provisoirement ?) les « connaissances incomplètes », parmi lesquelles je compte les fonctions prédicatives, les questions et, justement, le signifié, et cela afin d’établir le type de connaissance que constitue à son tour le sens.*

I have, up to this point, used for the signified the notion of “class of classes” of traditional logic: this has allowed me to consider that, just as the signifier is a class of signals, the signified is a class of senses and thus, given that the sense is a knowledge it is definitely a class, a signified is a class of classes. However, the notion itself has shown to be insufficient for the matters of the relationship between sense and signified (it is, I believe, also unusable in logic, but this is not of my concern). What I intend to study during the leave that will eventually be granted to me is what I call (provisionally?) the “incomplete knowledge”, within which I include predicative functions, questions, and, rightly so, the signifieds, and this is so in order to establish the type of knowledge that, in its turn, is constituted by the sense.

Most of the work done in this leave was to be included in the paper “Classi e classi di classi, contributo alla teoria del significato”. During the leave he also

worked on an article about translation; “L’atto di comunicazione traduttivo”. Both works, he adds, were to be published in the third volume of the *Saggi*.

Despite Prieto claiming that he did not see a solution of continuity among the different problems he was researching, it is undeniable that there are at least some connecting lines between them. The interesting fact, perhaps, is that such connecting lines are more like ramifications of some core proposals. Although the different research projects carried over different fields with which Prieto engaged can be considered as more or less “autonomous”, when these individual research projects are stripped down to their core proposals, one is bound to find certain commonalities and connections. If one decides to concentrate on one of these commonalities, the whole theory seems to be susceptible of being thus reconstructed. Let us explain ourselves better. It is our impression that, when approaching Prieto’s theory in this way, as if the major topics were linked together as communicating vessels, the theory can appear as a differently constituted coherent whole depending upon the point of view, and the pertinences we establish for our reading. For instance, one could focus on the theory of the subject. Although this was a late concern of Prieto, and his articles on the matter – the ones that are explicitly devoted to this problem – appeared only in the eighties, it was in *Pertinence et pratique* where the need for such theory was announced. Indeed, the theory of the subject seems to be brought up by nothing else than the examination of the *langue-parole* distinction, which leads Prieto to observe that semiotic structures are connected to one another, and in its turn, the examination of this enchainment takes him to consider as the departing point, as a first link in the chain, ‘a semiotic structure in which the objects signify the subject itself’ (the “*moi sujet*” in the original). One can certainly take this remark as a departing point for understanding Prieto’s whole theory. From this point of view, it is certainly possible to consider the whole of Prieto’s theory as geared towards a theory of the subject or, to be more precise, a theory of the semiotic, cognizing subject.

Indeed, from this point of view, the whole architecture of *Pertinence and practice* with the notion of “practice” at its center is calling for a theory of the subject, of the entity that exerts practices, the distinction between *langue* and *parole* appears as a purely cognitive/phenomenological problem, and Prieto’s grounding of cognition in *aesthesis* begs for a theory of the cognizing subject. All his work on syntax, on phonology, on the definition of “feature” as a cognitive construction, the profound reflection on what a “word” is, all these problems are able to thus appear as an extension of a theory of the subject, because they are approached as aspects of cognition: they are constructed primarily as objects of knowledge whose examination necessitates a theory of the cognizing subject. The vast field of the semiology of art would not be out of this view, but of course, this was the field of his research that more directly benefitted from his work on a theory of the subject.

In a beautiful text entitled “Ipotesi sulla significazione dell’opera d’arte”, and dedicated to his wife, Helvecia Girard, Prieto makes a touching exposition of his theory of the subject. A “subject” is constituted only by discovering “the

other”, but this “other” appears as a negation of what the subject is, and this derives from what Prieto calls the dialectics of space and time, in which a subject painfully and fatally exists. In order to ascertain its unity, its wholeness, a subject must renounce the hope of ever reaching the “other” that the subject is not. The discovery of the body of the other, that other that the subject is not and which is forever lost, is itself a dialectic of space, and as such it is pointing to the fact that spatial relations are a condition for subjectivity to emerge. This proposal of Prieto was the second reason why we chose Simmel’s words as epigraph to these notes, but it is also an eloquent way of making our point: Prieto’s theory can definitely be read as geared towards a theory of the subject. And we ourselves were convinced for a long time that this was the way to go if we were to show that Prieto’s theories are useful in contemporary semiotics.

But, of course, Prieto’s theory can be read from many other points of view, and it can appear thus accordingly constituted. After some hesitation, we decided to change our views, and approach Prieto’s theory not as a geared towards subjectivity, but rather towards an explanation of arbitrariness—in the Saussurean sense of the word. It seems to us that this choice was all the more productive for presenting Prieto’s theory as being able to constitute a general semiotics that can include biosemiotics. In the included publications we have some occasion to expand upon the implications of approaching Prieto’s theory as a theory of arbitrariness, of its different forms and of its consequences.

## 5.6. The last semiologist<sup>47</sup>

After almost a quarter of a century as holder of Saussure’s Chair, Prieto was now about to retire. The situation in Geneva was such that, due to financial reasons, the Chair in General Linguistics was at risk of disappearing. This, of course, was not seen without suspicion by some members of the linguistic community, who rather saw the disappearing of the chair as a sort of symbolic triumph, of the at that time new way of doing linguistics over the Saussurean legacy. In any case, the role Prieto had to play in the fate of the chair was, to say the least, controversial.

Two notes appeared on the *Journal de Genève* concerning the situation at the University, written by Juan Martínez. The first one, from December 1994, criticized the fact that Prieto had not prepared a successor for the chair, and it noted the perceived harshness of Prieto as a professor by pointing to the fact that only very few students finished their dissertations under his supervision. The note also cited the vice rector of the University saying that Prieto was never really interested in working with the Saussure archives. A second note, from January 1995, included Prieto’s responses to the claims made on the note from the previous month. There, Prieto says that he had devoted a great amount of

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<sup>47</sup> This heading is borrowed from the title of E. Fadda’s presentation at the 19<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Linguists: “L. J. Prieto, ou le dernier sémiologue structurel”.

time to his students, perhaps more than any other professor, but that he simply did not see someone who could become his successor in the chair among them. In referring to the established professors who might have been considered as candidates for the chair (although the note is not very clear about this), he is quoted saying 'I'm sad that [the chair] will disappear, but I prefer to see it shut down than to see it occupied by a mediocre person or an opportunist'. He is also quoted saying that in research only rigour matters, and that the greatest linguists have published in small amounts. Martínez adds that Prieto was saying this as a criticism against the "bibliographical inflation" that was overtaking the universities, and notes that Prieto was preparing the third volume of the *Saggi*. The note finishes with the author quoting Prieto, saying that he "regrets the Americanization of the sciences of man and the abandonment of anthropological reflection" and adds that these are fitting words in the mouth of one of the men who helped to found the University of Vincennes, a university that since its inception was supposed to host the "leftists". While the information of the note is aimed to be presented, one would think, in a neutral tone, there seems to be an interesting subtext to it. After Prieto's death, in March 31<sup>st</sup> 1996, the chair would indeed disappear.

As Daniele Gambarara tells us, Prieto worked until December 1995, just three months before his death. It is plain to see, I would think, that his life and his work deserve to be studied, even more so because of the seeming oblivion into which he appears to have fallen. Paraphrasing Sémir Badir, many people know Prieto, but nobody reads him. In that congress in Buenos Aires that I recalled at the beginning of these notes, I had the opportunity to talk for some brief moments with Paolo Fabbri. He had just reedited, in 2018, a small collection of Prieto's texts, mostly his articles on the work of art. Upon learning that I was studying Prieto, Fabbri made some suggestions to me and then told me that Prieto was a very nice person, as long as one would not discuss politics with him, he added. Pellegrino also described him as a man of strong convictions. Claudia Quijano told me that he had an immense curiosity and an insatiable thirst for knowledge. During the time I was working in the archives at Córdoba, I had a chance to meet Roberto Schneider, Prieto's nephew. Roberto is the son of one of the sisters of Helvecia Girard, Prieto's wife. We spent an evening talking about his uncle: "*Since they had no children, Luis and Helvecia*" he said to me, "*adopted me and loved me as their own kid, I still have the sword of Luis' father (he was a marine officer) hanging on my wall*". That evening was a touching moment, for I could catch a glimpse of Luis Prieto, the man.

In addition to his intellectual work, Prieto was also an artisan. He would design medallions, and he even set up an atelier in his apartment for carving chess pieces. The precision needed for such endeavors can be seen also in the refinement and attention to detail with which he built his theories. I can only hope the following pages do some justice to them.

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## SUMMARY

The task of this dissertation is twofold: on the one hand it aims to contribute to the dissemination of the works of Luis J. Prieto, on the other hand, it tries to demonstrate the heuristic capacities of Prieto's theory for contemporary semiotics. This work consists in a collection of articles, and it is thus divided into six sections and the appendix. The first five sections constitute the dissertation proper. Section six corresponds to the articles, and it comprises five published works and one unpublished manuscript.

The works of Prieto have not received too much attention in contemporary semiotics, and they are practically completely absent from English-speaking semiotics. As an effort to fill this void, we have included, as an appendix, two articles by Prieto translated into English for the first time. Concerning the secondary literature on Prieto, the Introduction to this work lists the main works and publications that have appeared in recent years which deal directly with Prieto's works.

One of the main challenges of writing this dissertation was that, because of its double aim, the research was framed in between two fields: the history – and epistemology – of semiotics and linguistics on the one side, and theoretical semiotics on the other. One of the main problems we had to face was how to approach Prieto's theory. On the historiographical aspect, the challenge presented itself as a question of naming: should we refer to Prieto's theory as *semiology* or as *semiotics*? On the theoretical side, the problem was: how to develop Prieto's theory into a general semiotic theory that includes bio-semiotics? Accordingly, section six, which includes the articles written during my PhD studies, is divided into two subsections: *Luis Prieto's semiology* and *Luis Prieto's semiotic theory and contemporary semiotics*.

Regarding the theoretical aspects, our first thought when beginning this research, was to develop one part of Prieto's theory that, to our view, was left unfinished by him, namely; his theory of the subject. Eventually, however, we recognized that to develop this aspect of Prieto's theory brought up more problems than the ones it could answer, and thus we shift our attention to a more fundamental question: the distinction between nature and history. For Prieto, the appearance of a subject is only possible with the appearance of a faculty of decision (and since this idea has been advanced also in biosemiotics, we thought that it would be easy to link Prieto to contemporary semiotics via the focus on subjectivity), however, a more careful analysis of Prieto's works shows that what is important about the faculty of decision is not that it can give rise to what Prieto defines as 'subjectivity', but rather, that the existence of faculty of decision entails the *arbitrariness of meaning*. Section two of this work presents a short summary of the texts included in this work, and it also presents some critical comments to them. These comments are mostly based on the fact that the articles were written with the conviction that Prieto's theory could be developed into a contemporary general semiotics starting from Prieto's

theory of the subject. Section three presents my own reading of Prieto's theory conceiving it as a theory of all forms of arbitrariness and its consequences. The 'new definition of semiotics' referred to in the title of section three is, precisely, a definition of semiotics that departs from the hypothesis that all meaning is arbitrary, and thus the proper task of semiotics is to study all the possible forms of arbitrariness and how, from what is absolutely arbitrary, can systematicity arise. Section three, thus, provides a brief explanation of two mechanisms that are at the core of sign systems – namely, articulation and proportionality –, and presents them on the basis of the Saussurean notions of *absolute* and *relative* arbitrariness. The section closes with another major idea of Prieto, which, nevertheless, was not completely developed, in practice, by him. This idea is built around the notion of *intercomprehension system* and it consists on the *enchainment of semiotic structures* (in Prieto's parlance, this was properly presented as an enchainment of *practices*); that is to say, the mechanisms by means of which different sign systems are linked to each other. In our reading of Prieto, we proposed that sign systems can be seen as linked to one another by either one of two *movements*: a 'connotative' movement or a 'metalinguistic' movement. Depending on which one of the movements is privileged, the sign system will appear as differently constituted and thus with a different function. We distinguish between two functions, or two tasks, performed by sign systems: ordering perception and enabling practices.

Regarding the historiographical aspects, section four presents our efforts to postulate a set of theoretical-methodological principles guiding our (future) work in the history and epistemology of linguistics and semiotics. The 'methodological considerations' we present in section four, are the product of our reflection upon the work done while writing the articles included in section six (especially the ones dealing with Prieto's semiology). The methodological considerations begin by presenting two ways in which one can approach the works of an author, and it thus distinguishes between a chronological approach and a teleological approach. The chronological approach amounts to a periodization and a description of the texts being studied. The teleological approach aims to explain how the key concepts appearing in the texts under study were developed. These two approaches inform the *contextualization* of the works. This contextualization is two-fold, for it is both historical (in the sense that it relates the texts to the moment in which they were produced and to the moment in which they are being studied), and theoretical (also in the sense that it relates the texts to its own contemporary theories and to theories contemporaneous with the person who is studying the texts). Each contextualization, in order to be delimited, requires to be further divided into two dimensions, one internal and one external. This division is meant to help the analyst in deciding where to locate a given fact, i.e. whether a given fact is properly theoretical or historical. The subsection 4.3. gives an example of how this methodology is applied in analyzing whether one should refer to Prieto's theory as *sémiologie* or as *semiotics*. The conclusion is that when the theory is referred to in the historico-theoretical specificity of the time when it was produced, semiology can be used.

If the theory is being referred to from the point of view of the contemporary, and virtually unified, field of semiotics, then 'semiotics' is preferable. Hence the different headings under which the publications are compiled.

Finally, section five presents the sketch of an intellectual biography of Prieto. The intellectual biography presented therein is certainly not exhaustive, and there is a lot of room for further elaboration. The main sources from which the biography was composed are the archive materials from the universities of Córdoba, Buenos Aires, and Geneva. There are some important omissions in this biography, mostly of people who were important interlocutors of Prieto, but this is mostly due to the fact that the biography was composed on the basis of the archive material, and we did not have access to Prieto's correspondence. The biography covers the years from 1946, roughly, to 1996, the year when Prieto died, and it presents, in the most detailed way possible, the academic trajectory he followed through all those fifty years.

The rest of this work consists in the publications. Since they are here reproduced in a facsimile fashion, the reader can easily find their separate abstracts. As for the translations, included in the appendix, they also include some notes about when and under which conditions the texts were originally published. Additionally, when it was necessary, I provided some explanatory notes to some of Prieto's ideas. The two texts included in the appendix were originally published in French but were subsequently translated into Spanish and Italian. The translations presented here were made on the basis of all the available versions.

## SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

### Luis Jorge Prieto semiootiline teooria

Käesoleval väitekirjal on kaks eesmärki: anda panus Luis J. Prieto tööde paremale tundmisele ja levikule ning demonstreerida tema teooria heuristilist potentsiaali tänases semiootikas. Väitekirja koosneb kuuest teadusartiklist, neid raamivast osast (mis koosneb omakorda viiest peatükist) ning lisast.

Prieto tööd ei ole nüüdisaegses semiootikas küllaldast tähelepanu pälvinud ning inglisekeelses semiootikas mainitakse neid harva, kuna neid pole inglise keeles ilmunud. Selle tühimiku täitmiseks on käesolevale tööle lisatud Prieto kahe artikli inglisekeelsed tõlked. Töö sissejuhatuses antakse ka ülevaade olulisematest viimastel aastatel ilmunud sekundaarsetest allikatest, mis otseselt Prieto töid käsitlevad.

Peamiseks raskuseks töö kirjutamisel oli vajadus käsitleda Prieto teooriat kahes plaanis: ühelt poolt semiootika ja lingvistika ajaloo ja epistemoloogia vaatepunktist, teiselt poolt teoreetilise semiootika vaatepunktist. Historiograafilisest vaatepunktist oli probleemne juba valdkonna nimetamine: kas Prieto teooriale tuleks viidata kui *semiologiale* või kui *semiootikale*? Teoreetilisest vaatepunktist oli küsimus selles, kuidas arendada Prieto teooriat edasi biosemiootikat hõlmavaks üldsemiootiliseks teooriaks. Nendest küsimustest lähtuvalt on töösse koondatud artiklid jagatud kahte allaossa: *Luis Prieto semiologia*, milles annan ülevaate Prieto teooria põhiseisukohtadest, ning *Luis Prieto semiootiline teooria ja tänane semiootika*, milles püüan luua dialoogi Prieto ja tänapäevaste semiootikakäsitluste vahel.

Teoreetilises plaanis oli uurimistöö algseks kavatsuseks edasi arendada Prieto teooria üht osa, mis käesoleva töö autori hinnangul jäi Prieto enda poolt lõpetamata, nimelt tema subjektiteooria. Ent uurimistöö käigus ilmnis, et selle arendamisel tõstus rohkem probleeme, kui see teooria lahendada suutis. See tõttu nihkus töö tähelepanu fundamentaalsemale küsimusele: looduse ja ajaloo eristusele. Prieto jaoks oli subjekti ilmumine võimalik üksnes otsustusvõime ilmumisel (ja kuna taoline idee on olemas ka biosemiootikas, osutus subjektiivsuse temaatika sobivaks fookuseks Prieto töö sidumisel tänase semiootikaga). Ent Prieto käsitluse põhjalikum analüüsimine näitas, et otsustusvõime tähtsus ei tulene sellest, et see loob pinnase 'subjektiivsuse' tekkeks, nagu Prieto seda määratles, vaid pigem see, et otsustusvõime olemasoluga kaasneb *tähenduse arbitraarsus*.

Väitekirja teises peatükis annan lühiülevaate käesolevasse töösse koondatud artiklitest koos kriitiliste kommentaaridega. Viimased tulenevad peamiselt sellest, et artiklid olid kirjutatud veendumusega, et Prieto teooriat on võimalik arendada tänapäevaseks üldsemiootiliseks teooriaks, võttes lähtekohaks tema subjektiteooria.

Töö kolmandas peatükis selgitan oma arusaama Prieto teooriast kui kõikvõimalike arbitraarsuse vormide ja selle tagajärgede teooriast. 'Semiootika uus

määratlus', millele selle osa pealkirjas viitan, ongi semiootika defineerimine lähtuvalt hüpoteesist, et igasugune tähendus on arbitraarne ja seega on semiootika ülesandeks uurida arbitraarsuse kõikvõimalikke vorme ning seda, kuidas täielikust arbitraarsusest saab tekkida süstemaatilisus. Sellest johtuvalt pakub töö kolmas peatükk lühida seletuse kahele märgisüsteemide jaoks kesksele mehhanismile – artikulatsioonile ja proportsionaalsusele –, esitades neid Sausure'i *täieliku* ja *suhtelise* arbitraarsuse mõistete alusena. Seejärel annan ülevaate veel ühest Prieto põhilisest, ehkki terviklikult välja arendamata ideest. See idee ehitub *vastastikmõistmise süsteemi (intercomprehension system)* mõistele ning sisaldab *semiootiliste struktuuride aheldumist (enchainment of semiotic structures – Prieto terminoloogias praktikate aheldumine)* ehk mehhanisme, mille abil erinevad märgisüsteemid on üksteisega seotud. Minu tõlgenduses näeb Prieto seda seost ühena kahest *liikumisest*: 'konatiivsena' või 'metalingvistilisena'. Sõltuvalt sellest, kumb neist on parajasti privilegeritud, näib märgisüsteem erineval viisil looduna ja seega ka erinevat funktsiooni omavana. Töös eristan kahte funktsiooni või ülesannet: taju korrastamine ja praktika võimaldamine.

Historiograafilises plaanis püüab töö neljas peatükk postuleerida rea teoreetilise-metodoloogilise printsiipi lingvistika ja semiootika ajaloo ning epistemoloogia (tulevaseks) uurimiseks. 'Metodoloogilised kaalutlused' on reflektatsioon väitekirja kuuendasse osasse koondatud (eelkõige Prieto semioloogiat käsitlevate) teadusartiklite kirjutamisel tehtud tööst. Alustuseks esitan kaks viisi, kuidas läheneda autori töödele, eristades kronoloogilist ja teleoloogilist lähenemist. Kronoloogiline lähenemine seisneb uuritavate tööde periodiseerimises ja kirjeldamises. Teleoloogilise lähenemise eesmärgiks on selgitada uuritavates tekstides esinevate võtmemõistete kujunemist. Need lähenemised on lähtekohaks uuritavate tööde *kontekstualiseerimisele*. Kontekstualiseerimine on kahetine: ühtaegu ajalooline (s.t suhestab tekstid nende kirjutamishetkega ja uurimishetkega) ja teoreetiline (suhestab tekstid nende endi ning ka uurija kaasaegsete teooriatega). Kontekstualiseerimise piiritlemiseks peab seda protsessi eritlema veel kahes dimensioonis: sisemises ja välises. Selle jaotuse eesmärgiks on aidata uurijal otsustada, kus antud fakti lokaliseerida, s.t kas antud fakt on teoreetiline või ajalooline. Alapeatükis 4.3 toon näite selle metoodoloogia rakendamiseks, lahendamaks küsimust, kas Prieto teooriale peaks viitama kui *semioloogiale* või *semiootikale*. Järeldus, milleni jõudsin, on see, et kui teooriale viidata selle loomise aja ajaloolis-teoreetilises spetsiifilisuses, peaks kasutama 'semioloogiat', kui aga teooriale viidatakse tänapäevase, nüüdseks sisuliselt ühtse semiootika välja vaatepunktist, võiks eelistada 'semiootikat'. Sellest tulenevad ka erinevad alapealkirjad, mille alla käesolevas töös sisalduvad teadusartiklid on koondatud.

Väitekirja viies peatükk sisaldab Prieto intellektuaalse biograafia visandi. Nimetan seda visandiks, sest see ei ole kindlasti ammendav ning jätab ruumi edasisteks täpsustusteks. Biograafia koostamisel kasutasin peamiselt Córdoba ja Buenos Airese (Argentina) ning Genfi (Šveits) ülikoolides olevaid arhiivimaterjale. Biograafiast jäid välja mitmed olulised aspektid, peamiselt inimesed,

kes olid Prietole tähtsateks vestluspartneriteks, kuna Prieto kirjavahetus ei olnud biograafia koostamisel kasutatud arhiivimaterjalide hulgas. Biograafia hõlmab aastaid 1946–1996, s.t kuni Prieto surmani, andes võimalikult detailse ülevaate tema akadeemilisest teekonnast nende viiekümne aasta jooksul.

Käesoleva töö kuues osa sisaldab kuus publikatsiooni. Lisas on esitatud kaks Prieto tekstide tõlget, mille juures on ka Prieto ideid selgitavad kommentaarid. Mõlemad tekstid on algselt avaldatud prantsuse keeles, ent need on varem tõlgitud ka hispaania ja itaalia keelde. Tõlkimisel kasutasin kõiki olemasolevaid versioone.

## APPENDIX. TRANSLATIONS

### A Semiology: Problems and Routes<sup>1</sup>

Luis J. Prieto

(translated by E. Israel Chávez Barreto)

1. If I should sum up in one phrase in what consists the semiology that I intend to present here – which is, by the way, nothing else than a generalization and development of the theories of Ferdinand de Saussure and his heirs of the Prague School – I would say that it is not a theory of knowledge, something already taken care of by philosophers, but rather a theory of the *raison d'être* of knowledge and, more precisely, of the *raison d'être* of the knowledge about material reality. This semiology is constituted based on the principle according to which the validity of such knowledge not only depends, as it is usually admitted, on its *truth* but it also depends on its *pertinence*<sup>2</sup>. Pertinence even appears as a logically previous criterion of validity in regard to the one

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<sup>1</sup> The present text was first published in Degrés (number 49–50, pages j1–j12) in 1987, as *Une sémiologie: Problèmes et parcours*. An Italian translation of this same text, made by Patrizia Molo, was published in 1989, in the book *Saggi di Semiotica I* (Prieto 1989: 9–22), and later on, a Spanish translation, from the Italian, was made available by Silvia Tabachnik and published in 1993 in the journal *Estudios* (number 2, pages 22–31) of the Centro de Estudios Avanzados at Córdoba University, in Argentina. In the Italian translation, the title of the paper is: *Una semiologia: problemi e risultati*, the Spanish translation, since it was made from the Italian text, also bears as title, *Una semiología: problemas y resultados*. Thus, an alternative title for this version could be *A semiology: problems and results*. However, it seems to me that translating the word 'parcours' as 'routes' can be better for connoting the heuristic power of Prieto's proposal at the light of contemporary semiotics. On the other hand, an important difference among the translations and the original French text is that the original version included a bibliographical note in which Prieto presented the main articles containing the major developments of the central ideas of his theory, this note was absent from the Italian version, and thus from the Spanish version as well. The present English version includes such note. There are other differences between the Italian and the French version, since the Italian version was revised by Prieto in order to be published in his *Saggi* (e.g. the bullet points are absent from the French version, but they appear in the Italian and Spanish ones, they are kept here for providing clarity). The present translation has taken all existent versions into account, and whenever possible we indicate the main divergences between them. The original article is listed as entry number 71 in Redard's bibliography of Prieto, published in the *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* 45 (1991). The Spanish translation is listed as "ad 71" in Redard's complements to Prieto bibliography published in the *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* 50 (1997). The Italian translation does not have an entry of its own, since it appeared as part of a book, and not as a separate article.

Footnotes to this text have my initials at the end (I.C.) indicating they are my notes, the absence of my initials mean the footnotes are from Prieto. Commentaries within the text, however, are marked I.C. or L.J.P. accordingly. – I.C.

<sup>2</sup> See Prieto's entry on *Relevance* in Sebeok's Encyclopedic Dictionary. – I.C.

constituted by truth, given that the question about the truth of a knowledge<sup>3</sup> (orig. *connaissance*) is only formulated in respect to a knowledge already considered as pertinent. Now, whilst truth is a relationship between knowledge and object, pertinence is, on the other hand, a relationship between knowledge and a subject, by definition historico-social, who builds pertinence and uses it. The semiology which takes as its starting point the principle according to which truth and pertinence contribute both to the validity of a knowledge can, therefore, also be characterized as the study of the *knowledges* about material reality, which take the subject into account, and which considers them therefore in what they have of historico-social<sup>4</sup>.

A problem often faced by those epistemologies which take truth as the only criterion for the validity of knowledges, without arriving to propose satisfactory solutions, is precisely the problem of uniting the existence of the material reality independent of knowledge with its historico-social character. Indeed, what guarantees (to us) that a material object exists independently of the knowledges that are constructed about it, is the threshold, established by the principle of non-contradiction, inside of which those knowledges can be true: given a characteristic (*alt.* feature) *a*, it cannot be at the same time true and false that a determined given object is *a*. If, for instance, the characteristic is being dealt with is “white”, it cannot be at the same time true and false that a given object is “white”<sup>5</sup>. It cannot be affirmed, in consequence, that a true knowledge in a given historic-social context could be false, without abolishing this limit and eliminating, with this limit, the object itself.

In order to avoid this difficulty, alongside the distinction between true knowledge and false knowledge, another distinction between “total” knowledge and “partial” knowledge has been introduced. Among the “total” knowledges of a given material object, only one can be true, whilst there can be an infinitude of “partial” true knowledges<sup>6</sup>. The relationship of knowledge with the historico-social context would be established not because the knowledge about an object, true in a given historic-social context, could be false in another context, but because the true knowledge about a given object in a given historic-social context could be *different* of the knowledge about the said object in another

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<sup>3</sup> The constraints of English grammar make translation a little bit challenging at this point. In French, Italian and Spanish, just as in Estonian, the word for *knowledge* (‘*connaissance*’, ‘*conoscenza*’ and ‘*conocimiento*’ respectively) can be pluralized (as ‘*connaissances*’, ‘*conoscenze*’ or ‘*conocimientos*’). The English *knowledges*, however, is deviating from normative English inflectional morphology, but it might be, nevertheless, a viable solution. A possible way of translating the plural form of knowledge could be “cognitions”, yet this would probably give the impression of a technical opposition between knowledge and cognition in Prieto’s text that is absent from the original version (Prieto didn’t use *cognitions* as technical term, but stick to *connaissances*). Therefore, the usage of “knowledges” will be preferred, and clarifications will be made when necessary. – *I.C.*

<sup>4</sup> Alternatively: “That considers them in their historic-social aspects”. – *I.C.*

<sup>5</sup> This example is not found in the French version, but only in the Italian and Spanish translations. – *I.C.*

<sup>6</sup> Alt.: “There can be an infinitude of true “partial” knowledges (*connaissances*)”. – *I.C.*

context, and yet be *equally true* in spite of that, and under the condition that at least one of the knowledges in question is “partial.”

Undoubtedly the historico-social character of knowledges presupposes the possibility of constructing different knowledges of a same object, and irrespectively of that fact, they all can be true. But in order to explain such character it is still necessary to state, on the one hand, why do “partial” knowledges are constructed, and, on the other hand, why is it so that when constructing them only a given “part” of the object, and no other, is taken into account. Now, to the extent that truth is considered as the only criterion of validity for knowledges, it is not clear neither to what can the construction of partial knowledges be attributed, nor how their diversity could be explained without adducing it, as it is usually done, to the argument about the limitations of man’s intelligence. The perfect knowledge of an object would be its “total” and true knowledge. Two different knowledges of the same object can never be, evidently, both “total” and both true; in consequence, the “total” and true knowledge of an object, because it would be unique, it would be situated beyond historico-social relativity. Such knowledge would be nonetheless only an ideal to which one points without ever reaching it. Man would accomplish to construct only “partial” knowledges, which, depending on the historico-social context, would approach more or less, and in different ways, to the ideal of the perfect knowledge. Explained in this way, the historico-social character of knowledge(s) (orig. *connaissances*) would constitute a purely negative trait: knowledges would be historico-social simply because man is not in condition of constructing knowledges that are not<sup>7</sup>. This perspective is completely modified if one admits that the validity of a knowledge depends also upon its pertinence. A knowledge is historico-social because, just as it is necessarily true or false, it is also – and with logical priority – necessarily pertinent or non pertinent and its pertinence depends on the historically and socially determined interests of the subject. The fact that they are “partial” does not constitute in any way, for a knowledge, a sort of handicap derived from the limitation of the intelligence which has constructed it: to consider about the object only those aspects relevant for the own interests, which means only those aspects that determine whether the object realizes, or not, the pertinent *concept* in regard to those interests, constitutes the very foundation of knowledge. Regarding the “total” knowledges – and granting there is some sense in talking about such kind of knowledges – what has been said is also applicable to them if they were possible and, for the same reasons, it would apply to any other knowledge: if a subject were to take into account the totality of the characteristics of the object, it would be because that totality counts (i.e. is relevant – *I.C.*) for the subject’s interests. The totality of the characteristics of the object would then be pertinent by historico-social definition, as would also be the knowledge determined by the totality of characteristics in question.

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<sup>7</sup> Alt.: “That are of any other kind”. – *I.C.*

2. The problem that – in terms that hide its true nature and prevent us to see its whole scope – was tackled by the phonologists of the Prague school is definitely no other than the problem of the *raison d'être* of a given knowledge. The phonemes are, indeed, nothing else but the concepts by means of which the speaker subject knows<sup>8</sup> (orig. *connaît*) the sounds and of which he recognizes (orig. *reconnaît*) the later (i.e. the sounds – *I.C.*) as realizations. By asking why, according to the sounds (and of course the *langue* – *L.J.P.*) is being dealt with, two different sounds are recognized by the speaker subject sometimes as a realization of different phonemes, sometimes as a realization of the same phoneme, the phonologists tackle the problem of establishing why, from all the true possible knowledges of which a given sound is susceptible to become an object, that is to say, of all the concepts that could be constructed and of which the sound in question would be a realization, it is precisely the concept constituted by the phoneme the one actually constructed by the speaking subject and is, therefore, pertinent for the speaking subject. The answer of the phonologists to this question is very well known. Reformulated, in terms that are not exactly theirs, it consists definitely in saying that the phonemes are the concepts pertinent for the speaking subject because in them are to be found all the traits of the sounds and only the traits of the sounds that are in relation with the signified (orig. *signifié*).

That which counts in the sounds in relation to the signified is nothing else than that which needs to be taken into account in order to understand and to make oneself be understood, that is to execute, using the sounds as means, the practice constituted by communication. Definitely, then, the pertinence of the way in which the speaking subject knows (orig. *connaît*) the sound is explicated, by the phonologists, by a *practice* in which the sound performs the role of a *means*. Now, the semiology presented here extends this explanation to every knowledge of a material object: the interests of the subject, historically and socially determined, are manifested through the practices executed to fulfill those interests; in this way, the pertinence, which is dependent upon the interests of the subject, possessed, according to the subject, by the way in which the subject knows (orig. *connaît*) a material object, always depends upon a practice in which the subject makes the said object to perform a certain role. This role, however, is not necessarily the role of a means. Like the means of every other practice, the means of the communicative practice, the signal, is a material object, but the end of this practice, constituted by the “sense”, is an object of thought. In other practices, conversely, the end is also a material object, which, evidently, is not produced *ex-nihilo*, but through the transformation of another material object. The role which a material object is made to perform in a practice can be, therefore, the role of means, or the role of end, or, lastly, the

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<sup>8</sup> Alt.: ‘cognizes’. – *I.C.*

role of “prime matter” that is being transformed, thanks to the means, to produce the end<sup>9</sup>.

The subject’s interest in the means of a practice presupposes the interest, logically previous, in the end of this practice. The pertinence borne by the concept, according to the subject, which determines the end as such, that is to say the concept that the object to be produced (orig. *l’objet à produire*)<sup>10</sup> must realize for the end to be achieved, is previous to the practice that seeks to produce it, and, in consequence, it (pertinence) cannot depend on it (practice). But this does not contradict, in any way, the generalization of the Prague school’s conclusions made by the semiology that is being introduced here. Indeed, before making an object play the role of end in a practice, we always make it play the role of prime matter in *another* practice. Thus, even though the pertinence of the concept which determines the object that we attempt to produce by executing a certain practice does not depend on this practice, anyway the said pertinence depends on a practice. It has to be pointed out, in addition, that although, following our previous statement, the object which is made to perform the role of end in a practice is already known (orig. *déjà connu*) in a way whose pertinence does not depend upon the fact that the object is made to perform this role in this practice, the said object is necessarily known (orig. *connu*) as well in another way, whose pertinence, on the contrary, cannot be explained without taking into account the practice in question. A means, indeed, can be used to achieve an end only to the extent the later belongs to the extension of a certain concept, the concept that constitutes the *utility*<sup>11</sup> of the means in question. Hence, if the subject, in order to produce an end that realizes a certain concept, chooses a given means, it is because the subject recognizes that this end *also* realizes the concept constituted by the *utility* of the means.

3. By extending the way in which phonologists explain the pertinence of the phoneme to the pertinence of every knowledge about a material object it is implied, given that knowledges that are not pertinent are never constructed, that a material object is known (orig. *connait*) only if it is made to perform a role in a practice. Now, I found necessary to make precisions to this position that has often cost me a lot of objections. With this position I do not intend to say that at the basis of a knowledge, particularly of (a) scientific knowledge (*connaissance scientifique*), there is always an actually executed practice, nor even the explicit recognition, on the part of the subject, of the possibility of a practice. Actually, my position could be formulated in much more traditional terms by saying, simply, that a concept that we construct, or that we use, is always a concept that an object must realize in order to be the cause or in order to be the effect of an

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<sup>9</sup> The end and the prime matter, given that one results from the transformation of the other, are numerically the same object.

<sup>10</sup> The object that *will be* produced. – *I.C.*

<sup>11</sup> For an overview, in English, of Prieto’s *instrumental act* and his notion of *utility* see pages 97 to 98 of Jeanne Martinet’s “The Semiotics of Luis Jorge Prieto”, in Sebeok, Thomas, *et al.* (eds.), *The Semiotic Web 1989*. Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 89–108). – *I.C.*

object (i.e. another object – *IC*) which realizes, in turn, another given concept, provided it is made clear that relations of cause and effect are not established simply because of the sole pleasure of knowing “the laws of nature”, as some contemplative ideologies try to make us believe, but rather because the effects in question are part of our interests, or can eventually become part of our interests, and thus because the causes which can produce them are also part of our interests, or part of our future interests. In my opinion, this is valid even for those disciplines with low “applicability” as, for instance, astronomy. For instance, Le Verrier’s calculus based on the “perturbations” in Uranus’ orbit that took him to the discovery of Neptune, do not consist in anything else than into establishing a concept (mass, orbit, etc. – *L.J.P.*) that an object must realize to be the cause of an object which in turn realizes the concept “Uranus with its perturbed orbit”. The objects that intervened in Leverrier’s calculus do not realize only the aforementioned concepts, and the knowledges respectively constituted by these concepts are not, in consequence, the only true knowledges one can have about such objects. But these knowledges are the pertinent knowledges for a practice that would attempt to “produce”, departing from a prime matter that realizes the concept “Uranus with normal orbit”, an object which realizes instead the concept for which Uranus is recognized as a realization and which partially becomes defined by the “perturbations” of its orbit. In the times of Leverrier’s discovery it could have seem ridicule to talk of such “practice”. The knowledges whose truth is corroborated by Leverrier’s discovery are, progress aside, not other than those whose pertinence is bound to the practice, effectively executed in our times, constituted by astronautics<sup>12</sup>.

4. Besides the object that is made to play the role of a medium in a practice, which is always a material object, and, when the end of the practice in question is also a material object, this latter object and the prime matter by means of which the object is to be produced, there is yet another material object that intervenes necessarily in a practice. Indeed, in a practice, the object which is made to perform the role of means becomes the cause of the end only if it undergoes a transformation (for instance the one which consists in being moved – *L.J.P.*) whose cause is the *body of the subject*. In order to be a cause for this transformation of the means, the body of the subject, in its turn, must be transformed: for instance the “inactive hand” of the subject must become a “hand that holds”. Now, for there to be practice, this transformation of the body of the subject and the object that results from it, for instance the “body (of the subject – *L.J.P.*) with hands that holds”, must not be in their turn caused by another object nor the necessary consequence of the state in which the body of the subject is at the moment in which the transformation takes place. The moment in which the inactive hand of the subject becomes a hand that holds, or, rather, at the moment in which the neural pulsation which ends in this

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<sup>12</sup> Le Verrier’s example has been mainly translated following the Italian and Spanish version, since it seemed to be better explained than in the French text. – *I.C.*

transformation of the hand is triggered, this neural pulsation should also be able to not to being triggered and, therefore, the hand not transformed. For there to be practice it is required, in other words, that the transformation of the body of the subject, which in its turn provokes the transformation of the object which performs the role of means in a given practice, must be a *decision*, that is to say a *non natural transformation*, understanding by “natural transformation” a transformation necessarily produced from the moment in which the object that undergoes it and other objects with which it enters into contact bear certain characteristics. The body of the subject, thanks to the faculty of decision it has, possesses a fundamental particularity: it can be a *cause* – a cause, for instance, for putting the means of a practice in movement – *without having been in its turn an effect*.

It is precisely because a practice presupposes a concatenation of causes and effects in whose starting point is to be found a cause which in its turn is not an effect, that there is no practice without decision. Conversely, may the body of the subject be the cause of a certain effect, this effect is not the result of a practice if the particularities of the body of the subject, in virtue of which the body is able to produce such an effect, are in their turn an effect: it would not be a practice executed by the subject when, for instance, the subject is pushed and its body, moved in this way, produces an effect. It is, by the way, always possible to ask whether we really have the faculty to choose or if, on the contrary, the non-natural character under which some transformations of our body appear to us is nothing more than an illusion, a mirage that the physiology of the brain will destroy some day. I don't think that, in the present state of the sciences, we are in conditions of answering this question, but we can make explicit what is at stake with this question.

Above all, it is only insofar as man is capable of decision (or choosing, orig. *décision* – *I.C.*) and thus his body can be a cause without having been an effect, that there can exist a *history* different from “natural history”, Without choosing (orig. *décision*) indeed, man's behavior would be completely integrated into the natural order of causes and effects, an order that wouldn't disturb anything and in relation to which, in consequence, nothing would be external. If, moreover, man's faculty of choosing would be nothing more than a mere illusion, the ethic dimension of his behaviors would be equally illusory, because this dimension is only possessed by the transformations of the body that are not imposed by the material state of it nor by the material state of any other object.

Finally, without the faculty of choosing there could not even be a subject. This, by the way, and given that it is hard to conceive history without subject (as much as it is hard to conceive the subject without history – *L.J.P.*), could be mentioned here as a simple corollary of the precedent conclusions. Nevertheless, the ties between decision and subject seem to me interesting enough to deserve an explicit consideration. I understand by “subject” a material object – the material object which constitutes the body of the subject – that has consciousness about its own individuality, this is to say of what is called its

“numeric identity”<sup>13</sup>. It has been already said that a natural transformation of a material object is a transformation which is necessarily produced from the moment on the object in question and other objects with which it is eventually into contact bear certain characteristics. The individuality of these objects, that is to say its numeric identity, does not intervenes whatsoever: the substitution of these objects by other numerically distinct objects leads, given they also bear the characteristics in question, to the same result, that is to say, to the same transformation<sup>14</sup>. The transformation of the body of the subject that constitutes a decision (if there is decision – *L.J.P.*) depends, on the contrary, only upon the *individuality*, upon the *numeric identity* of the subject that makes such decision. It is because of this that I attribute the discovery, on the part of the subject, of its faculty of decision a fundamental role in his becoming conscious of its own numeric identity, I consider that the fact of discovering his own faculty of transforming its own body independently from any other thing that is not its own body as individual object and, therefore, unique and unrepeatable, is precisely what enables the subject to have access to the consciousness of its numeric identity, and recognizing itself as *one*, it constitutes itself as a subject.

5. An object is a fragment of the material reality which is recognized as *one*, that is to say, a fragment of the material reality to which is attributed a numeric identity. By recognizing the numeric identity of the own body, the subject recognizes itself, then, as an object. Certainly, in order to recognize as *one* a given fragment of material reality, it is necessary as well to recognize as *one* at least *another* fragment of this reality. That is to say, a fragment of reality is not recognized as having a numeric identity, and consequently it is not recognized as an object, if at least another fragment of material reality is not recognized as having a numeric identity, and if this last fragment of material reality is not therefore recognized as an object. The starting point for this dialectic resides, however, in the corroboration (orig. *constatation*), made by the subject, of the faculty of decision borne by the fragment of material reality which its body constitutes, corroboration which takes him to discover not – or rather not only – the numeric identity of this fragment of material reality, but even the numeric identity *tout court*: in other words, it is by discovering itself as object that the subject discovers *the object*. It is because of this reason that between the (two – *L.J.P.*) fragments of material reality to which (unless – *L.J.P.*) the subject recognizes a numeric identity and which he recognizes therefore as objects, there is always its own body.

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<sup>13</sup> The individuality or numeric identity of an object is not determined, as it is usually said, or implied, by the totality of its characteristics. There is always, among the characteristics borne by an object and its numeric identity, an irreducible heterogeneity: an object can lose or acquire characteristics yet remaining unchanged itself as individual.

<sup>14</sup> The necessary dependency of a transformation upon certain characteristics of the objects, on the one hand, and on the other hand its independence regarding the numeric identity of such objects is what makes possible the construction of concepts and, therefore, the construction of sciences.

The discovery of the *object* implies, evidently a fundamental reordering of the way in which the subject apprehends material reality. Let us imagine what should indeed be the apprehension of this reality for a conscious being but for one who cannot, as it is probably the case with inferior animals and the human being in the very first moments of his life, reach the consciousness of its numeric identity. Such a being experiments sensations but, since it has not discovered itself as object and thus has not discover *the object*, a sensation evidently cannot appear to it as the manifestation of something which would be proper of an object. Its consciousness, one could say, would not go beyond an “adjective” level: it perceives “hungry”, “red” but not itself as an object that is hungry, or an object different from it as being red. The consciousness of a subject, conversely, is situated in a level that we could call in its turn “substantive”: to a subject, sensations appear as the manifestations of *properties*, of *characteristics* borne by the objects.

Because *time* is that within which a transformation is developed, that is to say that which is there between an *object* that bears a given characteristic and *this same object* that doesn't bears it (doesn't bears it anymore – *L.J.P.*), only a substantive consciousness is able to include time in its contents and, with it, the dichotomy *life/death*. The same holds for the impossibility of contradiction, for contradiction concerns the characteristics of a *given object* in a *given moment*. Thus the objects provided with characteristics in which the subject organizes its perception of material reality appear to the subject as objects that *are* – nothing can be but *within time* – and because they *are*, they appear as objects that cannot at the same time *not be*<sup>15</sup>.

Having started with the problem of the *raison d'être* of the phoneme, the semiology here presented arrives to a theory of the subject. It could not be in any other way from the moment on this semiology recognizes that the *raison d'être* of the phoneme, as the *raison d'être* of every knowledge whose object is part of the material reality, resides in a practice. Indeed, a practice can only be the practice of a subject, which in its turn is such only because is able to execute practices: these are nothing else than different aspects, or consequences, of one and the same fundamental fact, the faculty of decision borne by the human

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<sup>15</sup> It is possible that the levels of consciousness I call “adjective” and “substantive” correspond respectively to the psychoanalytic “imaginary” and “symbolic”, and that the passage from a level of consciousness to the other, made possible only by the discovering of numeric identity and of the object, are that to which psychoanalysis refers to when it talks about the substitution of the “partial” object (the mother) with the “total” object. By affirming that in the unconscious the principle of non contradiction does not holds, psychoanalysis stops supposing that there are representations of objects in the unconscious. I propose, rather, the hypothesis (reinforced by the non-temporality – *timelessness* – attributed by psychoanalysis to the unconscious) that the unconscious constitutes a level of adjective consciousness, that its contents therefore are not organized in objects, and that, in consequence, regarding it, the question of the validity of the non contradiction principle is not even an issue.

These remarks a propos some problems situated at the limit with psychoanalysis, remarks of which I am, of course, the only one to be held responsible, owe a big debt to the questions posed by Alberto Camisassa and to the interesting discussions they brought up.

being, thanks to which the human being can avoid natural causality and become, in this way, the creator of history.

This possibility, granted to man in virtue of his faculty of decision, of creating a reality that stands outside *of* nature, should not make us forget, however, that the faculty in question is a consequence of man's nervous system, and that therefore it is given to him biologically and, in consequence, is thus located in natural reality. This is the particular situation of man in the universe: man, it could be said, is biologically "programmed" to be able to produce a reality that does not obey biological "programming".

### BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

I should mention, before anything else, the works of the thinkers that have posed the fundamental ideas for the semiology presented here: Ferdinand de Saussure and Nicolas S. Troubetzkoy, certainly, but also, and just for mentioning the more important ones, Roman Jakobson, Louis Hjelmslev, Eric Buysens and André Martinet.

I provide a more detailed overview of this semiology, although today it is surpassed in some regards, in *Pertinence et pratique, Essai de sémiologie*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1975.

Two articles which show, in a better way, the last developments are:

"Entwurf einer allgemeinen Semiologie" in *Zeitschrift für Semiotik*, vol. I, pp. 259–265, Berlin 1979.

Participation (in French) to the "Tavola rotunda dei 'Quaderni de semantica' su 'Il concetto di natura umana in Chomsky'", in *Quaderni di Semantica*, 2/81, pp. 254–260 and 277–280, Bologna, 1981.

"Materialismo e scelte del soggetto" in *Rinascita*, no. 29, 4 March, 1983, p. 42.

"Decisión y Sujeto" in *Psicoanálisis, Revista de la Asociación Psicoanalítica de Buenos Aires*, vol. VII, pp. 85–107, Buenos Aires, 1985 (also in German: "Subjekt und Entscheidung. Zur Rolle von Norm und Geschmack beim symbolischen Ueberleben", in *Zeitschrift für Semiotik*, vol. 8, pp. 9–23, Berlin, 1986).

"Classe e concetto: sulla pertinenza e sui rapporti saussuriani 'di scambio' e 'di confronto'" in press for *Teoria*, Pisa<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> Also in French: Classe et concept: sur la pertinence et sur les rapports saussuriens « de comparaison » et « d'échange » in *Présence de Saussure*, Geneve: Droz, pp. 55–71, 1990. – The French version is part of the proceedings of a congress celebrated in 1988 at Geneva, that is to say, one year after the publication of the original version of *Une sémiologie*, since the proceedings were also published after the first publication of *Une sémiologie*, Prieto couldn't have possibly included them in his list. Redard's bibliography of Prieto in the *Cahiers* no. 45 (from 1991) lists this text as number 77, and it provides two places of publication: the book *Filosofia e linguaggio*, where it was published in Italian in 1989, and

About the practices in which the end is an object of thought:

“Langue et parole sur le plane du contenu” in *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure*, no. 35, pp.131–143, Geneva, 1981.

On the semiotic aspects of the artistic phenomenon:

“Cinema e verità” (in collaboration with Brenda Bollag) in *L'Unità*, 28 December, 1985, p. 14.

“Sur l'identité de l'œuvre d'art” in AA. VV., *Création et créativité*, Éditions Castella, Abeuve (Suisse), 1986, pp. 77–92.

“Ipotesi sul godimento dell'arte”, in Lucia Lazotti, *Leggere l'arte*, Edizioni Franco Angeli, Milán, 1987, pp. 9–13.

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the proceedings of the Geneva congress. However, it does not include Prieto's book *Saggi di Semiotica I*, published also in 1989, as another place where the article had already appeared. On the other hand, the 1989 edition of the *Saggi I*, gives to this article the status of *Inedito* (i.e. not published before). The complements to the bibliography of Prieto, also by Redard (published after Prieto's death in 1997, in the *Cahiers* no. 50), do report the publication of this text in the *Saggi I*. There is, however, no record, at least in the available bibliographies, that the article was published in *Teoria* as Prieto states here. – I.C.

# Pertinence and Ideology<sup>1</sup>

Luis J. Prieto

(translation by E. I. Chávez Barreto)

## The Discovery of the Object of Phonology

The event that created the conditions in which it was possible for the so called “Prague” phonology to be born, was the development of instrumental phonetics that took place during the last decades of the previous century (i.e. XIX century – I.C.): it was confirmed that there are, in the sounds that are produced when speaking, characteristics, or as the phonologists call them “features” (orig. *traits*) that are considered for the identity under which the speaking subject (*sujet parlant*) cognizes (alt. *knows*, orig. *connaît/ conoce*<sup>2</sup>) these sounds, and

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<sup>1</sup> This text was originally presented by Prieto at the first congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies in Milan, 1971. It was, accordingly, published in the proceedings of the congress in 1974, *Panorama sémiotique*. A revised version of the text was included as the last chapter of Prieto’s 1975 book, *Pertinence et pratique*. The definitive version of the text can be said to be the one that was included in *Pertinence et pratique*. A Spanish translation of the text appeared in *La palabra y el hombre*, no. 17, (a Mexican journal published by the University of Veracruz) in 1976. The translation was made by Diana Galak, and it included a small introductory note by Mario Ugarriaga. The present translation has been made on the basis of the French text that appeared in *Pertinence et pratique*, but I have also consulted the Spanish version (which is a mixture of the text published in *Pertinence et pratique* and the one published in *Panorama sémiotique*), and the version published in *Panorama Sémiotique*, specially to clarify some points that seemed obscure in a first reading. The text in *Panorama sémiotique* was not divided into sections, and some parts of it that appeared as footnotes were integrated as paragraphs of the main body of the text in the version published in *Pertinence et pratique*. This is the main reason I decided to follow the structure of the text as it appeared in that book. The text in *Panorama sémiotique*, however has the advantage that it was presented to stand on its own, but since the exposition seems more detailed and organized in the version of *Pertinence and pratique*, I decided to follow that one. I have included, however, one line from the *Panorama sémiotique* version almost at the end of the text (which is incidentally also present in the Spanish version, but absent, evidently, from *Pertinence et pratique*). As in the other translation included in this dissertation, the footnotes that are of my authorship will have my initials at the end, otherwise they are Prieto’s. However, when it was needed to make notes or commentaries inside the body of the text, or within the body of the footnotes, the author is indicated by initials. Additionally, in the footnotes, my commentaries are also in italics. I have omitted the footnotes that send the reader to other pages of the book, therefore, the numeration of the footnotes does not match their numeration in the book. Within the text, some words are in brackets and preceded by “alt.”, this means ‘alteratively’ and refers to another way some word/term could be translated. – I.C.

<sup>2</sup> The French “connaître”, as much as the Spanish “conocer”, could be translated by “knowing” in some contexts, but not in all of them without raising some ambiguities, it seems to us. In contrast with the other translation included in this dissertation, in this one, we have chosen to use “cognize” in most of the contexts, but we have kept “knowing” and its corresponding noun forms, in other passages. The reader should note that this is merely a

which are thus “pertinent”, and there are characteristics or features that are not considered for this identity, and which are consequently “non pertinent”. Given that characteristic and difference are but two aspects of one and the same thing, we can formulate what we have said up to here by saying, in terms that also are very familiar to phonologists, that it was needed, in order to phonology to constitute itself, the appearing, due to the development of phonetics, of the existence of pertinent phonic differences or pertinent phonic “oppositions”, which the speaking subject takes into account, and phonic differences or phonic oppositions that are non pertinent, and which the speaking subject does not take into account.

However, the moment in which phonology is constituted is not exactly the moment in which it was clear that there are features and oppositions that are pertinent and features and oppositions that are not pertinent, but rather the moment in which the searching for the reason of the pertinence or non pertinence of features and oppositions in the sounds themselves is abandoned, and with it, the attempts to explain, starting with the sounds themselves, the identity under which the speaking subject cognizes those sounds (orig. *les connaît/los conoce*). Indeed, it is not the sounds, but the identity under which the speaking subject cognizes them what constitutes the object of phonology. But this identity couldn’t have appeared as constituting a different reality than the one constituted by the sounds, and thus phonology could not have been a discipline defined by an own object, unless the identity in question was “denaturalized”, that is to say, unless it was acknowledged that such identity is not a necessary consequence of what the sounds are in themselves. The fact of renouncement to explain the identity of sounds solely by the consideration of them amounts, then, to discovering the object of phonology, and, of course, with the discovery of its object, to its very own constitution.

### **The basic problem of phonology**

We will insist repeatedly on the type of objects represented by the object of phonology, and, specially, on the type of events represented by the discovery of such objects. What is more urgently interesting for us is to explain what is the problem phonology poses for itself *à propos* its own object and how it resolves it. Given that the identity under which a speaking subject cognizes (alt. *knows*, orig. *connaît*) the sounds ceases to appear as “natural” and, accordingly, it

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“stylistic” resource, and the choosing of “cognizing” or “knowing” does not reflect any terminological distinction made by Prieto in the original French. Additionally, the pluralization of “knowledge” is not possible in English, but it is possible in French and in Spanish, e.g. “connaissance” and “connaissances”, “conocimiento” and “conocimientos”. It seems to us that this extends to the fact that “knowledge” is not countable in English, while its French and Spanish counterparts do behave as countable nouns (thus, in French it is possible to have “une connaissance”, but it seems to us that “a knowledge” deviates from the English norm). In these cases, we have decided to avoid the use of “cognitions” and thus we have kept the deviant form “knowledge(s)”. – *I.C.*

cannot be explained anymore by what sounds are in themselves, the problem becomes, precisely, to explain this identity. The teachings of Saussure, known via the *Cours de linguistique générale*, have certainly been of great help to phonologists: statements such as, for instance, the one according to which “the linguistic entity does not exist but by the association of a signifier and a signified” and by consequence, “a sequence of sounds is not linguistic unless it is the support of an idea”<sup>3</sup>, have, undoubtedly, being helpful for finding a solution to the problem.

This solution consists in explaining the identity under which the speaking subject cognizes the sounds by a determined point of view from which the sounds are considered, namely, the point of view of the relations they maintain with the signifieds: the characteristics of the sounds that cannot be changed without changing the signifieds are those that count for the identity under which the speaking subject cognizes the sounds, that is to say, their pertinent characteristics: the ones that, on the contrary, can be changed without there being a change in the signified do not count for the considered identity and are therefore non pertinent. Against what has been repeated, and continues to be repeated by phonologists – who, afraid to fall back into “mentalism”, refuse to accept that their object is the identity under which a speaking subject cognizes the sounds and persist in affirming that their object is constituted by the sounds themselves, which they submit to a “linguistic” study different from the one performed by the phoneticians –, it is not to determine which are the pertinent features of sounds that the recourse (alt. resource) to the signified is necessary: quite in the contrary, it was needed, precisely, the realization that certain features are pertinent and others not for posing the problem that the recourse to the signified comes to solve. The recourse to the signified is not necessary to determine which are the pertinent features of sounds, but it is necessary in order to account for the pertinence that these features bear.

### **Pertinence and identity**

It seems to us that the notion of “pertinence”, such as it has been elaborated by phonologists, figures among the notions that are part of the domain of semiology, of which we can benefit extensively in the elucidation of problems that are posed *à propos* ideology, even if this notion has been until now among the less used for this end. One the one hand, indeed, the problem that phonologists pose for themselves in respect to the identity under which the speaking subject cognizes the sounds of a *langue* (orig. *le sujet parlant connaît les sons de la langue*) is posed, in general, in respect to the identity under which a subject cognizes whichever material object, since in no case the pertinence of the characteristics that determine such identity have their fundamentals in the object itself; and on the other hand, it is, like in the case of the sounds, by the

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<sup>3</sup> “l’entité linguistique n’existe que par l’association du signifiant et du signifié” and “une suite de sons n’est linguistique que si elle est le support d’une idée”. F. de S. *CLG*, 1949, p. 144.

point of view from which the subject considers the material object, that this pertinence can be explained.

### **Concept and truth**

The identity under which a subject cognizes a material object is not, certainly, the way in which the subject conceives it: indeed, to cognize an object under a given identity is definitely nothing more than to recognize it as a member of a class and, consequently, as being part of the extension of a concept. This remark will allow us to establish certain points that will be useful later about the “truth” of a concept and the identity of the object that results from the fact of conceiving it through that concept. A concept does not become more true as it approaches the “ideal” that would consist in reproducing the object “such as it is” (*“tel qu’il est”*), and in giving a “global” and “totalizing” image: the map of the empire as big as the empire itself, which story<sup>4</sup> is told to us by Jorge L. Borges, if it were to be achieved, it wouldn’t be long before it would reveal itself as useless, and it would be thus condemned beforehand to rot, abandoned to the inclemency of the sun and the winters. It is in relation to its adequation, not to the object, but to the point of view from which the object is considered and upon which depends its pertinence, that the truth of a concept is measured: to say it with other words: if a concept can be considered as more or less true, it is only inasmuch as it approaches more or less the ideal that consists in retaining, of the object, all that it is pertinent in it, from the point of view upon which the concept is founded, and only that which is pertinent for this point of view.

### **The “significativity” of every cognition/knowledge (orig. *connaissance/conocimiento*)**

This point of view is no other, in what concerns the identity under which the speaking subject cognizes the sounds, than that of the relations they maintain with the signifieds. But a signified is definitely nothing else than an identity under which the speaking subject cognizes the sense, that is to say, that which is “said” in an act of speech (*acte de parole*), and thus a way of conceiving it (i.e. that which is said – *I.C.*). The pertinence of the manner in which the speaking subject conceives the sounds of the *langue (la langue)* supposes, then, a particular manner to conceive another object – the sense – pertaining to another “plane” or, in more rigorous terms, to a universe of discourse that is another than the one to which the sounds belong.

A perfectly analogous situation is found in respect to the identity under which a subject cognizes whichever material object: indeed, the manner in which a subject cognizes whichever material object supposes always, because its pertinence depends upon it, a particular manner to conceive another object

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<sup>4</sup> *Histoire de l’infamie, Histoire de l’éternité*, translation by R. Callois et L. Guille, coll. 10/18, p. 129.

that belongs to another universe of discourse. It is in this sense that, in our opinion, there is a right to say that the identity under which a material object is cognized and the manner in which it is conceived are always “significant”: only a way of conceiving the object that would be “natural”, because it would necessarily follow from what the object is in itself, could be said to be non significant and could not transcend the “plane” where it is situated. Conceived in this way, the “significativity” of knowledge (orig. *la “significativité” de la connaissance*) is different from, and it doesn’t seem superfluous to say it, a given “semantization” of ways of conceiving material reality<sup>5</sup>: the ways of conceiving material reality do not *become* significant, they *are* so in their very construction.

### Pertinence and society

To be sure, the point of view from which results the pertinence of the manner in which a material object is conceived is never imposed by the object itself. It is evident that, were this the case, the manner of conceiving an object would be “natural” since it would be in the object itself where the fundamentals of the point of view would have to be found<sup>6</sup>. The point of view from which results the pertinence of the manner in which an object is conceived is always brought (alt. *established*) by the subject. But, it must be immediately added, by a subject who is part of a social group, within which what can be called a “symbolic power” gives certain legitimacy to determined points of views<sup>7</sup>. It is not our intention to

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<sup>5</sup> Specially with the “universal semantization of uses” which we treated [elsewhere]. – L.J.P.

*The [elsewhere] refers to the pages of Pertinence et pratique where he dealt with this problem. Evidently, this passage of the text is a direct confrontation to Barthes.* – I.C.

<sup>6</sup> It is a paradox that the instruments (orig. *outiles*), that is to say the less “naturals” of objects, are the only ones that seem to impose themselves a point of view from which it would result a “natural” manner of conceiving them. Indeed, even if it can be conceived in another way, an instrument seems to be “naturally” conceived when it is considered from the point of view of its utility (orig. *utilité*): it is possible, for instance, to conceive a key as a paperweight, but it is only when it is conceived from the point of view of the doors it opens that it is conceived “naturally” (cf. A. Martinet, “Où en est la phonologie?”, *Lingua*, vol. 1, p. 38). But this is only seemingly: if the point of view that defines the utility of an instrument and the manner of conceiving it that results from that point of view have a certain priority over the others, this is not because this point of view is imposed by the object, but because this point of view, being the one of the subject who produced the instrument at the moment when it (the subject – I.C.) actually produced the instrument, explains why the object has been produced by the subject. But nothing prevents from consider the instrument from other points of view, from which result other ways of conceiving it that are as pertinent as the other. It is interesting to remark that the essentialist epistemologies, that is to say the ones that seek to explain a manner in which an object is conceived starting from the object in itself (and thus to impose this way of conceiving it as the only legitimate one), have usually turned to a “god creator of all things”, for whom all things would happen to be, in a certain way, instruments.

<sup>7</sup> Sociologists like P. Bourdieu and J.-C. Passeron have precisely used this concept of “symbolic power” to explain the way in which the dominant culture “imposes itself” in a

deal in depth with the notion of “symbolic power” (and even if we would like to, we are not sure we could), neither to study the position of individuals in respect to it. We will indicate only, in this regard, two facts that seem evident to us: on the one hand, the essential mechanism of “socialization” of a child or of an immigrant consists, definitely, in their being made to accept the manners of conceiving material reality that result from the points of view legitimized by the symbolic power; and, on the other hand, innovation, in matters of pertinence, when it does not relegate its author to the condition of crazy, sorcerer or marginal, needs the acceptance of instances, or representatives, of the symbolic power. Regarding our problem, the essential is this: given that the subject is always a social subject every knowledge (orig. *toute connaissance*) of material reality has, at the very level of the construction of the identity that it recognizes to its object, a component: pertinence, which, not having been “given” by the object but, on the contrary, being brought by the subject, is, by this fact, also social.

Thus, not only, since pertinence never comes from the object, there is no knowledge of material reality that would be “objective”, in the sense that the knowledge could be passively placed faced to the object and reflect it “such as it is” or, in any case, in a way that owes nothing to the object. But, given that pertinence is always brought/established by a subject who is always a social subject, it follows that there cannot be knowledge of material reality that is socially “neutral”. And this conclusion is valid, of course, so much for the non scientific ways of knowing material reality, as it is for the scientific ways of knowing that reality, that is to say, for the sciences of nature. No doubt, the knowledge(s) of material reality and, in particular, the sciences of nature often seem to escape the “social passions”. But this is not an impossible neutrality<sup>8</sup>, it is instead a coincidence in non-neutrality.

### **Material reality and historical reality: The sciences of man**

If we have limited ourselves, up to this point, to the analysis of manners of conceiving and of knowing (cognizing) material reality (something that, probably, has not stopped bothering the reader), it is because there is no other reality that is given independently of man, in such a way that, if there would not be precisely the knowledge(s) of material reality, there would be nothing else that such reality that could be known. In producing knowledge(s) of material reality, the cognitive activity (orig. *activité cognitive*) of man creates, next to this first and natural reality, another, second and historic reality, constituted by knowledge(s) itself (themselves). There is in this a consequence of the fact that a

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given society, insisting, in particular, on the role of the scholar institution in the imposition to a large public of socially legitimized pertinences. Cf. P. Bourdieu and J.-C. Passeron, *La Réproduction*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1970, specially pp. 18–46.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. note 2. In French: “Mais il s’agit alors, non pas d’une neutralité impossible, mais d’une coïncidence dans la non-neutralité”. *Pertinence et pratique*, p.149. *I believe it is necessary to maintain the undetermined article in English – I.C.*

knowledge of the material reality is never “natural”: a knowledge of material reality that would be natural, that is to say, that it would necessarily follow from the reality of its object, would not, in effect, constitute a distinct reality of the one constituted by its object, it would rather solely be a sort of prolongation of it. What is particularly interesting for us is that, from the fact that a knowledge of material reality constitutes a reality that does not get confused with the reality of its object, this other reality is susceptible to become, in its turn, the object of a(nother) knowledge.

A knowledge of this kind, that is to say, a knowledge whose object is in its turn a knowledge, is perhaps always scientific<sup>9</sup>. The sciences of man are precisely, in our opinion, the (scientific) knowledge(s) of which their object belongs, not to the natural reality that is material reality, but to the historic reality that constitute the knowledge(s) of material reality. Under this conditions, it is needed, being rigorous, to place among the sciences of man, the epistemologies of the sciences of nature, whose object is constituted by the different manners to conceive and scientifically knowing material reality. The disciplines usually called “sciences of man” are those who have as object a non scientific manner of knowing/cognizing material reality. Their model is given to us – and this is due to reasons that are not all of them subjective – by linguistics which studies *langues (les langues)*: a *langue*, indeed, is definitely nothing else than a given, non scientific, manner of conceiving material reality – which is called in linguistics, with a term that gives rise to misunderstandings, the linguistic “sentiment” of a speaking subject – or, if it is preferred and which amounts to the same, a semiotic structure determining a manner of knowing/cognizing material reality. But it seems to us that *usage*, modes of production, moral norms<sup>10</sup>, the erotic costumes of a society, which constitute (or can constitute) the object of respective sciences of man, are nothing else than manners of conceiving and of knowing material reality specific to a given society.

### Knowledge and praxis

There can be an objection to our statement according to which a *langue* is definitely nothing else than a determined manner of knowing material reality. The objection could be that a given *langue* is indeed a given way of knowing material reality, but that a *langue* is above all a means of communication, and

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<sup>9</sup> That this is the case or not constitutes, as of now, a question that concerns only marginally the problems we have been discussing in this essay. It would be needed, to this end, to refer to a definition of what is a “scientific knowledge”. Without pretending to solve the problem that such definition brings up, we will point out a characteristic that always, it seems to us, appears in a scientific knowledge, and which does not, on the contrary, appear in a non scientific knowledge, to wit the explicit statement of the concepts with which the said knowledge operates.

<sup>10</sup> Evidently, not the discourse about moral norms, but moral norms such as they are manifested in the behavior of individuals.

we could expect analogous objections regarding usage, modes of production, etc., which we have also defined above as determined ways of knowing material reality. (orig. *façons de connaître*).

What justifies, in our opinion, our statement, is that, precisely, a “function”, that is to say, a practical aim – as, in the case of *langue*, communication – is always attached to the point of view from which, as we have seen, results the pertinence of a knowledge of material reality, and that there is, consequently, never a knowledge of material reality that is only knowledge. In other words, the manner in which the objects of a universe of discourse are known, always aims at dealing in a certain way with the objects composing another universe of discourse – or it, inversely, results from the way in which the objects of another universe of discourse are known with the aim of dealing with the objects of the first universe of discourse: a way of knowing the objects of a universe of discourse always implies a praxis<sup>11</sup>. Since, on the other hand, every praxis implies the knowledge of the reality upon which this praxis is exerted, knowledge and praxis are inseparable and, in consequence, it can be said, inasmuch as we have said that the sciences of man have as their object the diverse ways of knowing material reality, that the sciences of man have as object the diverse forms of praxis exerted upon material reality.

### **The constitution of a science of man**

It is understood, if we accept our point of view, that a science of man cannot be constituted unless the historical, non “natural”, character of the knowledge of material reality that constitutes its object has been recognized. We have already seen this, in connection to phonology: phonology, a science of man, whose object is the way in which the speaking subject cognizes the sounds that are produced in speaking, has been confused with phonetics, a science of nature, whose object is constituted by those sounds in themselves, because the way of knowing them has not been recognized as arbitrary in the Saussurean sense of the term, and because, accordingly, the historic reality that the way of knowing them constitutes has not been “detached” from the natural reality which the sounds themselves constitute. It is in this “detachment”, a true epistemological rupture, where it resides the discovery of the object of a science of man and it is to this rupture, in consequence, that it is linked the act of its constitution.

### **Point of view and sciences of man**

A problem is posed to us immediately, that of determining if what we have said up to here about the knowledge(s) of material reality is valid as well for the knowledge(s) of historical reality, that is to say for those knowledge(s) of knowledge(s) of material reality that are the sciences of man: does a knowledge whose object is a knowledge always suppose, like the knowledge of a material object, a point of view, established by the subject, which must be taken into

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. K. Marx, *Thèses sur Feuerbach* I, V et XI.

account for explaining the identity that such knowledge recognizes to its object? To ask this question amounts, evidently, to ask, on the one hand, if the knowledge whose object is a knowledge of material reality should be considered, or not, as constituting a distinct reality of the one constituted by its object and thus susceptible to become, in its turn, the object of another knowledge; and on the other hand, if the conclusion to which we have arrived regarding the impossibility for a knowledge of material reality (and, consequently, for the sciences of nature) of being objective – in the sense that everything that determines the knowledge comes from the object itself – is, or not, equally valid for a knowledge whose object is a knowledge of material reality (and, consequently, for the sciences of man).

We believe to be able to rest our argumentation in two facts – with unequal value – for advancing a negative answer to these questions. The first one is not other than the absurdity to which a positive answer leads. If we do admit that a knowledge whose object is a knowledge of material reality constitutes a distinct reality than the one constituted by this said knowledge and that this knowledge can, in consequence, become in its turn the object of another knowledge, we do not see why this last one cannot be considered in its turn as constituting a distinct reality from the one constituted by its object and as susceptible to become, this knowledge too, the object of another knowledge, and follow this indefinitely: the epistemology of physics could in this way become the object of an epistemology of an epistemology of physics, which would be, in its turn, susceptible to become the object of an epistemology of an epistemology of an epistemology of physics, etc.

The resort to this indefinite chain of knowledge(s) that would become the object of other knowledge(s) has a value as a proof inasmuch as the demonstrations *ab absurdo* can be considered proofs. But we have mentioned the existence of a second fact that comes, it seems to us, to reinforce our position, and which touches more closely upon the bottom of this problem. A material object is, without a doubt, “inexhaustible”, in the sense that we cannot recognize to it all the characteristics that it presents, or, at least, in the sense that we can never affirm that we recognize to it all the characteristics that it presents<sup>12</sup>. Thus, it can never be affirmed, regarding, for instance, the material object constituted by a sound, that all its characteristics are recognized, or, meaning the same thing – but highlighting in a clearer way the impossibility of it –: that we recognize it as being different of all the objects from which it differs. A material object is consequently susceptible to be known/cognized under an

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<sup>12</sup> Evidently, we are not referring here to the limitations of the powers of the sensorial organs through which our knowledge of material reality takes place. The sensation, or *aisthesis* (sic), of a material object is, this sensation itself, already “inexhaustible”, in the sense that it can never be affirmed that we recognize, to the object in question, all the characteristics that through its *aesthesis* we can recognize to it.

indefinite number of identities<sup>13</sup>, that is to say of receiving an indefinite number of “determinations”: and the synthesis of all the identities under which it is possible to cognize/know a material object delivers but another identity, of which we cannot in any case that constitutes its absolute identity and that it gives us access to what the object is “in itself”. It is there where it resides the non “natural” character possessed by every identity under which a material object is known (its social character is due, as we have seen, to the subject that brings/establishes the point of view upon which depends the pertinence of the identity in question). There it is, once more, the reason why a knowledge of material reality, whether it is scientific or nonscientific, can never be objective in the traditional sense of the term. It seems to us that contrary to a material object, the object of thought which is that of the sciences of man is “exhaustible”, that is to say that it presents a definite number of characteristics, whose totality can be recognized as such. A phoneme, for instance, cannot seem to be able to receive an indefinite number of determinations: we fail to see, indeed, how could two phonemes, and in general two classes or, what amounts to the same, two concepts, be different between each other if it is not by their intension and correlatively by their extension or by the point of view from which it results the pertinence of their intension or their extension. We can see there, at the same time, a consequence of the fact that a concept is constructed by human activity, and the condition, on the other hand, of the fact that man can operate with it. And it cannot be argued, to bring forward the contrary complementary thesis with the fact that man operates with the concept, that man does not operate but with that which is pertinent of the concept. Where would it be the non-pertinent *of the concept*? There is nothing, in the concept, that is not pertinent, and what is pertinent, being the product of a human activity, is necessarily finite. The phonologists are very well aware of the fact that the question of distinguishing between pertinent features and non pertinent features is not posed *for the object*, id est for the material object, the phoneme being defined precisely as “the sum of phonologically pertinent particularities born by a phonic image”<sup>14</sup>. Differently from what happens for a material object, an object of thought can be known under an identity that is itself explained in its entirety by the object – the identity under which the object is known when all its characteristics are recognized – and which, by reflecting the object as it is, constitutes its absolute identity.

In this way, the sciences of man, whose object is a way of knowing material reality and, consequently, the determined point of view from which results the pertinence of this way of knowing, do not consider their object from a determined point of view. Phonologists, meanwhile, have often struggled to recognize this particularity, in what concerns their discipline, due to fact that

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<sup>13</sup> But not under whichever identity: an object that belongs to a class can be recognized or not as member of that class; but it cannot be recognized as member of the corresponding complementary class.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. N.S. Trubetzkoy, *Principes de phonologie*, translated by J. Cantineau, Paris, Librairie Klincksieck, 1949, p. 40.

there is certain confusion about phonology's object. Phonology does not study the sounds, but the phonemes, which constitute a way of knowing the sounds. Thus, when Martinet, for instance, affirms that: "at the basis [...] of phonology there is this idea [...] that it is humanly impossible to exhaust the reality of the studied object"; that "in order to give, of no matter which object, a coherent description, it is convenient to choose a point of view and maintaining it", and that "it is from the point of view of function, and from it only, that we can say something about the identity [...] of linguistic elements<sup>15</sup>", he speaks, evidently, as if the object of phonology were, not a way –that of the speaking subject – of knowing the material object that is the "spoken chain", but the "spoken chain" in itself<sup>16</sup>. Certainly, in phonology, there is a point of view at play, but upon this point of view is founded not the pertinence of the knowledge phonology constitutes, but of the knowledge that constitutes its object. It is needed, to say it in another words, not to confuse the two different roles that a point of view plays; one the one hand, when it constitutes an element of the construction of a knowledge – that from where results its pertinence – and, on the other hand, when it constitutes the object of a knowledge: the object of phonology being the way in which a speaking subject knows/cognizes the sounds, the point of view that gives an account of this way of knowing the sounds – which, as we know, is the one of the rapports that links them to the signifieds – is a part, also, of the object of the discipline; but the discipline does not positions itself, to consider the object, from any point of view. We think, by the same token, that *The Capital*, for instance, does not study the capitalist modes of production from a determined point of view, but instead, that what it tries to do is to make explicit the determined point of view from which it results the pertinence of the way of knowing material reality that is the mode of production under consideration.

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<sup>15</sup> Martinet, *op. cit.* p. 37–38

<sup>16</sup> Compare, also, Martinet's statement according to which "these considerations [about the necessity of a foundation upon a point of view to give a coherent description of an object] seem like banalities to the geometer, to the physician, or to the chemist. But, what appears after centuries as a truth of evidence to specialists of the sciences of nature, still at times escapes from those who are dedicated [...] to submit human progress to the exam and classifications of science" (*ibid.*, p. 37), to the passage, already quoted, where Saussure says that, while "in other domains it is possible to speak of things "from this or that point of view" [...] it is forbidden to us in linguistics [...] to speak "of a thing" from different points of view [...] because it is the point of view what (alt. who? or. Fr. *qui*/Sp. *el que*) [therein] MAKES the thing" (*Cours*, Engler's critical edition, p. 26, col. 5). Certainly, we interpret the "MAKES" of Saussure in the sense of "constitutes", of "is". It is that, in our opinion, and despite the preference that another interpretation has, the only interpretation that agrees with the context: if, indeed, it is interpreted in the sense that it is the point of view what constructs the object – something we do not deny –, why would Saussure after having affirmed, without restrictions, that "the relation of identity depends upon the variable point of view that is decided to be adopted" (*ibid.*, p. 26, col. 3), would restrict to linguistics the consequences of the fact that "it is the point of view what/who makes the thing"?

## **Historicity and objectivity in the sciences of man**

Two corollaries follow from what has been said up to here. On the one hand, sciences of man do not constitute a different reality of their object, a reality that would be, so to say, historical to a second degree – and susceptible of becoming consequently the object of a science of sciences of man<sup>17</sup>. That is the consequence of the fact that the knowledge which is a science of man can be entirely explain by its object. The sciences of man are, certainly, part of historical reality, but only because their reality is embrangled with the reality of its object, which precisely is the historic reality. These conclusions agree very well with a fact that, it seems to us, cannot be brought into question, to wit that the fundamental dialectic relation is the one established between history and nature, between matter and knowledge, and that it cannot be reproduced between history and history, between knowledge and knowledge, as it would be the case were we to admit that the relation of knowledge to its object is the same when this object belongs to material reality than when it belongs, on the contrary, to historic reality.

On the other hand, the sciences of man, contrary to sciences of nature, can be objective, in the sense that they can reflect their object as it is, and they can be “neutral” also, since the subject does not bring any component to the construction of the knowledge that constitutes them. It often happens, however, that far from being under the cover of “social passions” they are found, on the contrary, at the center of them: this is a piece of evidence that we cannot deny, but which explanation requires that we begin by giving a precise definition of what we understand by “ideological knowledge” and by “ideology”.

### **Another possible way of “objectivity”**

If, following what we have observed, a knowledge about material reality cannot in any case have a pretension of objectivity in the traditional sense of the term, that is to say in the sense that everything that determines it comes from the object itself, knowledge about material reality can be, it seems to us, objective in another way. We have seen, indeed, that from the moment when the historicity, that is to say the “arbitrariness” of a knowledge about material reality, is recognized, the “detachment” of this knowledge in regard to its object is produced. From that same moment on, it is also necessarily produced, by reciprocity, the “detachment” of the object in regard to the knowledge. In another terms, this nothing else but the evident fact that by recognizing that a knowledge constitutes a distinct reality than that which its object constitutes, it is necessarily recognized that the object constitutes a different reality than that which its knowledge constitutes. A knowledge of material reality to which its historicity is recognized, and only a knowledge of material reality under these

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<sup>17</sup> The epistemology of an epistemology is embrangled, in our opinion, with it. A science of man being, in a certain way, the epistemology of a non scientific knowledge of material reality, renders it at the same time its own epistemology.

circumstances, is thus a knowledge that, in a manner of speaking, respects the objectivity of its object, and because of this it deserves, it seems to us, to be considered in a certain way as “objective”. It is thus precisely when we recognize that a knowledge of material reality is not objective in the traditional sense of the term that it can become objective in the sense we propose here<sup>18</sup>.

### Ideological knowledge

The opposite of an objective knowledge (in the sense that we have just defined and which would be the only one in which, unless we specify, we will use the term from now on) of material reality is a “naturalized” knowledge of this reality, that is to say a knowledge of material reality that is considered as deriving necessarily of what an object is, whether it is supposed that this knowledge passively reflects the object “such as it is”, or whether it is supposed that the pertinence of the characteristics determining the identity of recognized to an object is imposed by the object itself (as long as they would define, for instance, its “essence”). We do not believe to be making a very aberrant use of the adjective “ideological” by using it to qualify in this way a knowledge that is in this way “naturalized”.

The qualification of “ideological”, that we thus oppose to the qualification of “objective” is not applicable, as it is the latter, but to a knowledge whose object belongs to material reality.

On the other hand, such as we have defined it, an ideological knowledge is not necessarily false, in the same way that an objective knowledge is not necessarily true. This remark concerns, evidently, the truthness or falsehood at the level of the conception of the object, since it is at this level where the subject’s establishment/bringing of a point view intervenes, from which it results the historicity of the knowledge in question. The speaking subject, for instance, generally considers that if it recognizes two sounds of the *langue* as being identical, it is because they are identical, and that if it recognizes them as different, it is because they are different. Or, if it recognizes differences between two sounds that are nevertheless, for the speaking subject, the same sound, it thinks that these differences are secondary and that they do not affect the identity of the sound in question: the speaking subject would say, for

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<sup>18</sup> The fact that the subject considers an object from a certain point of view from which results the identity under which the object is cognized, does not imply that the subject recognizes the historicity of this knowledge and that this knowledge appears as constituting a different reality than the one constituted by its object. The subject, indeed, generally considers that the identity of the object precedes the point of view and that it is, thus, independent. In this way the speaking subject is certainly conscious of the fact that, if sounds are produced or if they are brought under attention, it is because of they refer to the signifieds, but the speaking subject thinks that the identity under which it knows them is their own identity, and that it does not depend in any way of the signifieds. It undoubtedly contributes to this illusion the fact that the historicity of a knowledge cannot be, evidently, detected (alt. unveiled/revealed) by a reference to the object “in itself”/(alt. “as such”, orig. Fr. *en soi*), but in relation to another knowledge of the same object.

instance, that it is the same sound pronounced by two different persons. In both cases, the way in which the speaking subject conceives the sounds of the *langue* appears to the speaking subject as imposed by the sounds themselves and hence as “natural” and it remains, for the speaking subject, ideological. Now, this does not prevent the way in which the speaking subject conceives the sign to be, in general, true, as it retains everything that, in the sounds, is pertinent from the point of view upon which this way of knowing the sounds is founded (to wit, that of the relations with the signifieds) and only what, from this point of view, is pertinent.

As long as it can be specified what a scientific knowledge and a non scientific knowledge are, there does not seem to be an insurmountable incompatibility between these two forms of knowledge and their objective or ideological character in the way we have defined them.

### Ideology

We will call “ideology” every discourse about a knowledge of material reality that seeks to “naturalize” such knowledge, that is to say, that attempts to explain it, or to make it appear, as the necessary consequence of what its object is. When the “naturalness” of a knowledge of material reality appears as following from itself, which renders redundant any attempt to explain the knowledge in question, we will say that such knowledge is embrangled with its own ideology, or that it constitutes it. This is, for instance, what often happens with the speaking subject in respect to the way in which it knows the sounds of the *langue*: for the speaking subject the question of the adequation to the sounds of the way in which it knows them it is never posed, and to demonstrate it would be nothing else, in its opinion, than to demonstrate something that is evident<sup>19</sup>.

Embrangled, or not, with a way of knowing material reality, an ideology always plays, in respect to such knowledge, the same role: that of denying, implicitly or explicitly, its historicity, and of maintaining it, thus, in its condition of ideological knowledge. We have seen that the fact of recognizing the

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<sup>19</sup> At least during the 50's, there were linguists who reacted in this way to Praguean phonology: a very well known Romanist told to the author of these lines, in 1952, that he considered superfluous to write an article of twenty pages in order to demonstrate that there are five vowels in Spanish. – L.J.P. *The Romanist of whom Prieto is talking about is, most certainly, Fritz Krüger. Evidence for this is, on the one hand, the review Krüger wrote of Prieto's thesis, which was precisely a thesis on the phonology of Spanish. In his review, Krüger wrote that it was a shame that he couldn't give a better grade to Prieto's work, and he called him an "exceptional philologist", but he added that the 'very nature of phonology' didn't allow Prieto to achieve very successful results as the ones he could have achieved in other areas of linguistics. Most likely, by 'other areas of linguistics', Krüger meant semantics, as he was a follower of Schuchardt's *Wörtern und Sachen* method. This, Krüger's adscription to Schuchardt's position is the other evidence we can present for supporting our claim. It is to be noted that Schuchardt was firmly opposed to the Neogrammarians, and their phonetic laws (this should be noted even if according to Prieto, the Neogrammarians did not acknowledge the historicity of their object). – I.C.*

historicity of a knowledge of material reality is the necessary and sufficient condition for the constitution of a science of man that has this knowledge as its object. It follows, on the one hand, that there is, between ideology and science of man, the same relation of opposition that exists, as we have seen, between ideological knowledge and objective knowledge of material reality; and on the other hand, that there exists, between objective knowledge of material reality and sciences of man the same relation of reciprocal implication that exists between ideological knowledge of material reality and ideology:

KNOWLEDGE OF MATERIAL REALITY	DISCOURSE ABOUT THE KNOWLEDGE OF MATERIAL REALITY
<i>ideological</i>	<i>ideology</i>
<i>objective</i>	<i>sciences of man</i>

From the moment when the historicity of a knowledge of material reality is recognized, at the same time in which this knowledge is transformed from ideological to objective, a science of man is constituted, due to the discovery of its object, which comes to substitute the ideology that implies, as long as it remains ideological, the considered knowledge.

### **Objectivity and class struggle**

We believe possible to found upon the definitions of “ideological knowledge” and “ideology” proposed above the explanation of the fact that, in spite of the absence, in the construction of a science of man, of a point of view established by the subject, and in spite of the objectivity, in the traditional sense of the term, that in consequence these disciplines possess, they are, often, the “scenario of political and social struggle”.

The constitution of a science of man, as we have already pointed out many times, is embrangled with the discovery of the historicity of a knowledge of material reality, a knowledge that thus becomes the object of the said science of man and in regard to which the problem of making explicit the point of view that explains it, by explaining its pertinence, is posed. Thus, inasmuch as the point of view from which results the pertinence of a way of knowing material reality is not acceptable for the majority of the members of a society because it benefits a part of them to the expense of the others, privileged ones are interested in maintaining the ideologies that hide the historicity of the ways of knowing material reality that confer them their privileges and to be against the constitution of the sciences of man that would come to substitute these ideologies.

On the contrary, only a class that does not aims to have privileges, that is to say the proletariat, can do without ideologies that would come to dissimulate the points of view from which it aspires to consider material reality with the aim of controlling it and modifying it. To say it in another way, only the ways of

knowing reality resulting from the points of view imposed by the proletariat can allow themselves to be objective in the sense we have given to this term.

## Relativism

It seems important to us, to highlight that the previous conclusion does not imply that the ways of knowing material reality that result from the points of view imposed by the proletariat must be more objective, in the traditional sense of the term, than any other way of knowing material reality<sup>20</sup>. It is not necessary, however, to be afraid of the “relativism” that comes with such an affirmation. Our relativism, indeed, is the logical consequence of the fact that an object is not known but in its rapports – in its *relation* – to other objects: in a relation of opposition in respect to other objects that belong to the same universe of discourse and in relation of signification in respect to objects that, on the contrary, belong to another universe of discourse. Our relativism is thus not to be confused with the one that would consist in claiming that, for instance, the membership of an object to a class or to its complement do not depends upon the object, but upon the subject. This other relativism would claim, for instance, that a sound that is cognized/known as “voiced” could be equally cognized/known as “non voiced”, that is to say as “voiceless”. Ours, on the contrary, sustains that if a sound can be cognized/known as “voiced”, it can equally not be recognized as “voiced”, but in no case it can be cognized/known as “voiceless”.

We find at least surprising that scholars who, it seems to us, would not hesitate to admit that an object is cognized/known only in relation to other objects, try, nevertheless, to found the truth not upon the object as considered in relation to other objects, but upon something that resembles the object “in itself”<sup>21</sup> (“*en soi*”). In this way, since the diversity of that which, depending upon time and space, appears as true cannot be denied, they are forced to

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<sup>20</sup> Justice (which cannot be but social) constitutes a way of knowing certain material facts. In consequence, it is always founded upon a point of view from which results its pertinence and it is never objective in the traditional sense of the term. Evidently this is valid for *every* justice: there are no less than two thousand years of Christianity that can explain the persistence of some people to believe in a Justice (with a capital J) that would be an exception to what has been said. The struggle between rightwing and leftwing is not, consequently, a struggle between justice (the Justice) and injustice, but a struggle between a justice founded upon the points of view of a class and the justice founded upon the points of view of another class. The bourgeois justice can certainly be unjust, but it is not necessarily so, and above all it cannot be so but in relation to itself. If there is a difference of nature between the justice of the proletariat and the bourgeois justice, this difference resides in the fact that proletarian justice can make explicit the points of view from where its pertinence derives and become in this way objective, in the sense we give to this term, while the bourgeois justice, if it wants to keep its efficacy, must remain ideological.

<sup>21</sup> Such an incoherence is due, it seems to us, to the lack of clarity of what the relations that we call of “signification” are, that is to say, definitely, the relations that phonology brings to light by seeking to explain the pertinence of the way in which the speaking subject cognizes/knows the sounds.

resource, in order to explain such diversity without “falling” into relativism, to other theories equally dangerous<sup>22</sup>.

### Sciences of man and social praxis

What we have said about the class interests linked to different points of views from which material reality can be considered already suffices, it seems to us, to show that the objectivity, in the traditional sense of the term, that we attribute to the sciences of man, do not places them at the margins of political and social struggles and that, in consequence, the fact that these disciplines are usually at the heart of these struggles does not contradict our conclusions. But we think that there is one more important reason why these struggles are particularly the concern of the sciences of man. Every praxis that deserves this name supposes, indeed, the knowledge of the reality upon which this praxis is exerted, that is to say of the reality that it aims to transform. In what concerns the praxis exerted upon material reality, there is the very well known example of the architect and the bee, Marx already said that only the architect can be considered as the agent of a praxis, because the architect knows the reality that he attempts to transform, while this is not the case – or at least it so it is supposed – of the bee. The reality upon which the social praxis is exerted is the one we have designated as historic reality, and the social changes that it seeks to produce is nothing else than the substitution of a way of knowing material reality for another way of knowing that same reality<sup>23</sup>. The social praxis supposing the knowledge of the knowledge(s) of material reality, sciences of man appear as the condition of such praxis. If, thus, *The Capital* is at the heart of the political and social struggles, it is not because it studies the capitalist mode of production from the point of view of a social class, for instance, the point view of the proletariat: it is there because it substitutes the ideologies that seek to “naturalize” the way of knowing material reality that is the capitalist mode of production and to make their victims accept this way of knowing material reality as inevitable. Even if it is paradoxical, *The Capital*, in so doing, transforms from ideological to objective the way of knowing material reality that is the capitalist mode of production, and in this way it creates, for the proletariat, the conditions in which a true

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<sup>22</sup> For instance, Adam Schaff, who distinguishes on one side the “total” truth, and on the other side the “partial” truths. But, since “total” truth constitutes something like an unreachable “ideal”, nothing else but “partial” truths can be established, from where it comes the diversity of what appears as true. Cf. A. Schaff, *Histoire et vérité*, Paris, Ed. Anthropos, 1971, p.101 et ss., et passim.

<sup>23</sup> Social praxis aims, in consequence, to transform the ways of transforming material reality. A praxis, it seems to us, could not be such without involving, in one way or another, the transformation of material reality. Thus, if a knowledge whose object is an “arbitrary” knowledge is able to become, in its turn, the object of another knowledge (see *supra*), we would be obliged to admit the possibility of a praxis disconnected of material reality. Indeed, it would be possible, in the case under consideration, to transform the ways of knowing the knowledge(s) of material reality without transforming them and, in consequence, without transforming the ways of transforming material reality.

social praxis, which seeks to replace this way of knowing material reality for another one in which the distinction between a class of exploited and a class of exploiters would be abolished, is possible.

## **PUBLICATIONS**

## CURRICULUM VITAE

**Name:** Eugenio Israel Chávez Barreto  
**Date of birth:** April 23, 1991, Mexico City  
**Email:** chavezbarretoei@gmail.com  
**Address:** Uus 13b-57, 50603, Tartu, Estonia

### Education:

2018–2022 PhD in Semiotics, Tartu University  
2016–2018 M.A. in Semiotics, Tartu University  
2008–2015 B.A. in Linguistics, Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico

### Academic experience:

2021 Teaching Assistant, University of Tartu. *History of Semiotics*. Prof. Kalevi Kull, Silver Rattasepp.  
2020–... Main Organizer of *Semiosalong*. In collaboration with Tyler James Bennett (Palacky University), Ludmila Lackova (Palacky University), and Elli Marie Tragel (Tartu University).  
2018–2021 Teaching Assistant, University of Tartu. *Biosemiotics*. Prof. Kalevi Kull  
2018 Teaching Assistant, University of Tartu. *From Linguistics to Semiotics, From Saussure to Prieto*. Course co-taught with Katre Pärn.  
2012–2016 Research Assistant, Prof. Mauricio Beuchot. Seminario de Hermenéutica, Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

### Recent presentations:

2022 The semiosphere and the connotative sign: Juri Lotman and Luis Prieto. Paper presented at the conference *Juri Lotman's semiosphere* at Tallinn University and the University of Tartu, Estonia. February 25–28.  
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\*Paper awarded the best student presentation prize.  
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2020 On the possible. Some notes for a structural biosemiotics. Paper presented at the *20th Gatherings in Biosemiotics*. November 27–29.  
2019 Towards a theory of translation in Luis Prieto. Lecture at the Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, Escuela de Lenguas, Área de Traductología, Córdoba, Argentina. October 4<sup>th</sup>.

- 2019 The metro lines of Mexico City: indexicality and iconicity in the content plane and degrees of articulation. Paper presented at the *14th World Congress of Semiotics*, Universidad de las Artes, Buenos Aires, Argentina. September 9–13.
- 2019 Coupling action with perception: Luis J. Prieto and Jakob von Uexküll. Paper presented at the *14th World Congress of Semiotics*, Universidad de las Artes, Buenos Aires, Argentina. September 9–13.
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## ELULOOKIRJELDUS

**Nimi:** Eugenio Israel Chávez Barreto  
**Sünniaeg:** 23. aprill 1991, Mexico City  
**Email:** chavezbarretoei@gmail.com  
**Aadress:** Uus 13b-57, 50603, Tartu, Estonia

### Haridus:

2018–2022 PhD, semiootika, Tartu Ülikool  
2016–2018 M.A., semiootika, Tartu Ülikool  
2008–2015 B.A., lingvistika, Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico

### Akadeemiline kogemus:

2021 Õppeassistent, Tartu Ülikool. *History of Semiotics*. Prof. Kalevi Kull, Silver Rattasepp.  
2020–... Semiosalongi peakorraldaja, kaaskorraldajad Tyler James Bennett (Palacky Ülikool), Ludmila Lackova (Palacky Ülikool), and Elli Marie Tragel (Tartu Ülikool).  
2018–2021 Õppeassistent, Tartu Ülikool. *Biosemiotics*. Prof. Kalevi Kull  
2018 Õppeassistent, Tartu Ülikool. *From Linguistics to Semiotics, From Saussure to Prieto*. Kaasõppejõud Katre Pärn.  
2012–2016 Urimisassistent, Prof. Mauricio Beuchot. Seminario de Hermenéutica, Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

### Hiljutised ettekanded:

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